Report third Dutch/Flemish country desk and policy lab (morning) & thematic workshop (afternoon)

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CONTENT

Horizon 2020 project COME-RES

The research project "COME RES" was launched on 1 September 2020. This 30-month project aims to support the roll-out of renewable energy communities in nine European countries to encourage and facilitate the collective production of renewable energy. The results of the project can be accessed via the project website: COME-RES | Home. Interested parties can also subscribe to the COME RES Newsletter on the website and follow the project on Twitter and Linkedin.

Working directly with market players and stakeholders, the COME RES project organises solution-oriented dialogues with stakeholders to jointly create solutions to remove existing barriers to the growth of renewable energy communities. To facilitate these dialogues, each country has a so-called 'country desk'.

Belgian/Dutch country desk

Also in Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands, the project's partners, VITO, TUEindhoven and REScoop.eu, aim to have a regular dialogue with stakeholders through a shared country desk. Together with local partners, they reflect on the factors that stimulate or inhibit the growth of energy communities.

The country desk participants will meet at least three times during the project duration and exchange ideas and good practices to promote the roll-out of renewable energy communities in Flanders and the Netherlands. The thematic focus in Flanders and the Netherlands is on integrated approaches (e.g. microgrids, virtual power plants). The reports of the country meetings in Flanders and the Netherlands are also available on the project website: COME-RES | Belgium and COME-RES | The Netherlands.

Aim

The third meeting of the Dutch/Flemish country desk took place on 18 October 2022.

During the meeting, the progress of the COME RES project was explained by Erika Meynaerts (VITO/Energyville). Two project results were discussed in more detail, in particular the comparative analysis of the regulatory and enabling framework for renewable energy communities in the 9 COME RES countries (Michael Krug, FUB) (D7.1) and the results of the stakeholder survey (Erika Meynaerts & Erik Laes, VITO/TUEindhoven) (D3.4).

Following the country desk meeting, an interactive policy lab and thematic workshop were organised. During the policy lab, a panel debate was held that elaborated on some policy-relevant results from the comparative analysis and stakeholder survey. During the thematic workshop, the Energy Community Platform was presented (Sara Tachelet, REScoop.eu).
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The country desk meeting, policy lab and thematic workshop were a joint initiative of COME RES partners VITO/Energyville, TUEindhoven and REScoop.eu. The meeting was chaired by Erika

Meynaerts (VITO/Energyville). The policy lab was moderated by Erik Laes (VITO/Energyville) and Rien de Bont (TU/Eindhoven). Maarten Tavernier (VVSG), Jan de Pauw (Ecopower, REScoop Flanders), Joep Mol (Platform Coöperatief Duurzaam), Siward Zomer (Energie Samen) supported the policy lab as members of the panel. Sara Tachelet (REScoop.eu) took care of the practical organisation of the meeting.

Agenda

10h00 - 10h15	Welcome & agenda (Erika Meynaerts, VITO)
10:15 - 10:35	Comparative analysis of regulatory and enabling framework for RECs in 9 countries (Michael Krug - FUB Freie Universität Berlin (FUB))
10h35 - 10h45	Questions (Rien de Bont, TUEindhoven)
10h45 - 11h05	Results stakeholder consultation on RECs (Erika Meynaerts & Erik Laes, VITO & TU/Eindhoven)
11h05 - 11h15	Questions (Rien de Bont, TU/Eindhoven)

BREAK

11h30 - 12h15	Panel debate - Moderator: Erik Laes, VITO - Jan de Pauw, REScoop Flanders & Ecopower - Maarten Tavernier, Association for Flemish Cities and Municipalities - Joep Mol, Platform Coöperatief Duurzaam Noordoost Brabant - Siward Zomer, Energie Samen
12:15 - 12:30	Further steps & closing (Erika Meynaerts, VITO)

LUNCH

13:30 - 13:45	Welcome & agenda (Erika Meynaerts, VITO)
13.45 - 14.15	Presentation Energy Community Platform (Sara Tachelet, REScoop.eu)
14.15 - 14.30	Q&A (Rien de Bont, TU/Eindhoven)
14.30 - 14.35	Further steps & closing (Erika Meynaerts, VITO)

Participants

A total of 21 stakeholders from 19 different organisations participated in the country desk meeting, policy lab and thematic workshop, with representation from local and national governments, energy cooperatives, network organisations, and research/knowledge institutions::

- FUB, Freie Universität Berlin
- Renewable energy cooperatives: ZuidtrAnt, ECoOB & Volterra
- VVSG
- Kamp C
- Energie Samen

- Energiecoöperaties Hart van Brabant
- REScoop Vlaanderen
- Brabantse Milieufederatie
- VITO
- TU Eindhoven
- REScoop.eu
- Vlaams Energie -en Klimaat Agentschap
- Flux50
- TKI Urban Energy
- DuneWorks
- Platform Coöperatief Duurzaam
- Witteveen+bos

Summary presentations country desk

The sections below summarise the main conclusions from the presentations given at the meeting as well as the reflections of the country desk members.

Michael Krug (FUB) presented the results of the *comparative analysis of the regulatory and enabling framework for renewable energy communities* (RECs) in the 9 COME RES countries. The analysis is a snapshot (dated 15 July 2022) of the progress made by the 9 countries on:
- Definitions, rights and market activities for RECs
- Enabling frameworks for RECs (art. 22, §4 RED II)
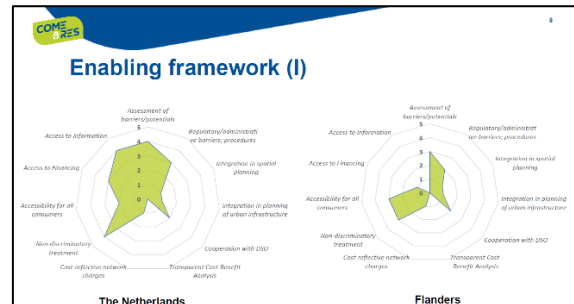- Support schemes for RECs

This is a qualitative and quantitative assessment (5-point scale) of the performance of the 9 countries. Norway was not included in the quantitative analysis because it is not a member of the EU and therefore has no obligation to transpose. Poland was also excluded from the quantitative analysis because it only has draft regulations for citizen energy communities and not RECs.

Overall, it can be said that there is a significant difference between the nine countries analysed in the progress made:
- 15 July 2022, Flanders and Italy had made the most progress in transposing definitions, rights and possible market activities of RECs.
- Most countries have limited their transposition to a literal copy of the definitions from REDII.
- Italy, Portugal and Flanders are among the frontrunners on energy sharing provisions.
- Most countries have made good progress in transposing the definitions, but no country has developed an enabling framework that fully or largely meets the minimum requirements of RED II. The different levels of government (not only national/regional but also local) have a role to play in supporting RECs.
- Removing existing barriers is crucial, e.g. long authorisation procedures, technical restrictions in Italy, Spain and Poland.
- A number of countries have promising measures specifically targeting the promotion and support of renewable energy communities, e.g. energy sharing incentives in Italy,

quantitative targets in the Netherlands, specific support schemes or revolving funds in Germany and the Netherlands.

We refer to the [report](#) (annex p. 59 for Belgium (Flanders), annex p. 161 for the Netherlands) en de [policy brief](#) for more background information on the comparative assessment.

The quantitative assessment illustrates that Flanders scores well on the transposition of the legislative framework and the Netherlands scores well on the implementation of an enabling framework and specific support schemes for RECs. These results need some reflections and nuances:

− Meanwhile, in the Netherlands, the regulatory framework was also transposed with the publication of the new Energy Act, resulting in a more positive score for the Netherlands today.

− The Climate Agreement targets 50% local ownership for large-scale onshore renewable electricity generation. However, this target is not binding and is not a formal permit condition.

− The Federal Government (responsible for offshore wind) and the Flemish Region have adopted a different interpretation when transposing the renewable energy community concept. The federal government has explicitly put the citizen at the centre.

− In Flanders, steps are being taken to set up enabling framework for energy sharing and RECs, e.g. VREG has recently launched a study to carry out a cost-benefit analysis on grid tariffs, REScoop Flanders has received additional support, the grid operator has set up an IT system to enable energy sharing and by the end of 2022 a call system will be set up specifically for energy communities and energy sharing in apartment buildings. Once these measures are fully implemented, this will also have a positive impact on the score for Flanders.

In addition, Michael Krug explained the support scheme for RECs in Germany in more detail. In 2017, the system of feed-in tariffs or premiums was abandoned in Germany for a system of auctions. Energy communities were given certain advantages within the auction system, e.g. uniform price regulation (highest successful bid instead of own bid), exemption from building permit in case of bid submission. The new Government decided to exempt energy communities from the auction system. Energy communities will receive a fee, feed-in premium, and no longer have to compete in auctions, at least if they fall under the EU de minimis regime (6 MW for PV and 18 MW for wind).

Finally, two interesting publications were shared by REScoop.eu:

Transposition Guide: https://www.rescoop.eu/toolbox/how-can-eu-member-states-support-energy-communities

− Practical guide citizen energy - briefly outlines the regulatory context, but mainly guides you through the different steps to set up a citizen energy project: https://www.rescoopv.be/publicaties/burgerenergie

The transposition tracker on the REScoop.eu website will be expanded to include a new "layer" namely, the implementation of the enabling framework and support mechanisms for RECs.

Erika Meynaerts (VITO) & Erik Laes (VITO, TU/Eindhoven) presented the results of the *stakeholder survey* sent out in May/June 2022 to the members of country desks in the 9 COME RES countries. The online survey aimed to solicit stakeholders' views on relevant actors, technologies and legal forms, promising sectors and key opportunities and barriers for development of RECs. It also probed stakeholders' familiarity with REDII and REC as a concept, as well as national and local policies and support mechanisms for RECs. In the 9 COME RES countries, the survey was answered by 651 respondents, 70% of whom completed the survey in full. In Flanders, there were 42 respondents, 81% of whom completed the survey in full. In the Netherlands, there were 30 respondents, 80% of whom completed the survey in full.

In general, the following conclusions could be drawn from the survey:
− RECs play an important role in the energy transition towards a low-carbon society
− Production of electricity and PV are respectively the most relevant activity and technology for RECs
− Energy cooperatives play an important role in Western Europe and are seen as the most relevant legal form for RECs
− Local authorities and citizens (e.g. neighbourhoods, sports associations, civic organisations, etc.) are seen as most relevant participants in RECs
− Clear and adequate regulatory frameworks should be set up so that prosumers can sell surplus energy produced to the grid and share their self-generated electricity.
− Key measures to promote the development of RECs include setting policy objectives, capacity building for local authorities, along with providing funding and information
− Substantial proportion of respondents are not familiar with the provisions of REDII and the enabling framework (art.22, REDII) for RECs
− Nonetheless, vast majority of respondents consider all measures in the enabling framework (art.22, REDII) for RECs as urgent to implement

The report with the detailed results of the stakeholder consultation in the 9 COME RES countries will soon be published on the project website.

From the country desk came the following additions to the results of the survey in the Netherlands:
− Energy cooperatives in the Netherlands are certainly also active in the built environment at housing level, especially behaviour and savings. Energy cooperatives are asked, also by local authorities, to play a role in this.
− The popularity of integrated systems in the Netherlands is also driven by efficient use of limited space. If you combine wind and PV, you also have more even production of renewable energy over the day and night.

- In Brabant, in addition to cooperation at national and local level, we now see cooperation between the 4 RES regions (e.g. exchange of experiences around communication).
- Citizens have no legal position for setting up renewable energy projects. The objective in the Climate Agreement is often explained as participation that runs through local government and less as direct participation of citizens and companies.

Summary policy lab

Erik Laes (VITO) moderated an *interactive panel debate* on the regulatory and enabling framework for renewable energy communities in the Netherlands and Flanders. During the debate, the following questions/questions were put to the panelists (Jan de Pauw, REScoop Flanders, Maarten Tavernier, VVSG, Joep Mol, Platform Coöperatief Duurzaam Noordoost Brabant, Siward Zomer, Energie Samen) and members of the country desk:

- What can Flanders/the Netherlands learn from REDII transposition in other EU countries?
- Our survey indicates that fair access for RECs to the energy system (based on cost-benefit analysis) is a priority. In what respect is current access not fair?
- What role for the (local) government: reluctant (as a facilitator) or active (financier or participant)?

The following paragraphs summarise the reflections of the panellists and country desk members on the aforementioned questions. Here, we distinguish between the context in Flanders and the Netherlands.

Flanders

At the local level, Flanders has some good examples of provincial and municipal decisions linking citizen participation to the development of renewable energy projects on their territory. However, these decisions are not legally enforceable, so citizens' initiatives do not have equal access to renewable energy projects as commercial players. There is a need in Flanders for a enabling framework as in the Netherlands.

In Flanders, there is a legal framework for renewable energy communities but too little stimulating policy. There is still a large potential for renewable energy in Flanders that is currently untapped and RECs are an important instrument to fulfil this potential. There are still a lot of barriers. The current market regime encourages keeping everything behind the meter. The same distribution network tariffs are applied, for example, to apartments sharing energy from a collective solar roof as apartments taking energy directly from the grid.

In Flanders, energy communities can register on the website of the regulator, VREG. It is unclear who checks and verifies these applications and whether European regulations are complied with. Unclarity about what an energy community is, is only increasing. Energy sharing can have a positive impact on energy bills. It is clear what the impact is of collective energy sharing as applied by cooperative energy suppliers in recent decades. However, it is unclear what the impact of the new energy sharing is.

In Flanders, energy suppliers are not eager to stimulate the possibilities of energy sharing among their customers and, for example, charge a fixed fee per connection point that shares energy (an obstacle if you exchange only a small quantity of energy). A general framework for energy suppliers on how to deal with customers that share energy would be useful. That way a renewable energy community can clearly explain to citizens what the advantage of energy sharing is. Today there are still too many variables that make energy sharing in a renewable energy community a bold financial undertaking. If no clear financial benefit can be communicated to participants of a renewable energy community, nobody is going to embark on this adventure.

An energy cooperative is ultimately a business, even if it was started on the initiative of a few volunteers. Getting subsidy streams right is quite a challenge (e.g. financial energy cooperatives require access to the same money streams, only needed in start-up phase?). In Flanders, with 4-5 energy cooperatives per province, it is already difficult to keep them all profitable. Professionalisation is needed to be able to prospect, bring in more projects and develop them further. Development of renewable energy projects is a profitable activity. The government should provide a proper policy framework that encourages renewable energy production instead of giving subsidies to citizen cooperatives for developing renewable energy projects (for renovation projects, it is more difficult to make a profitable business case today).

The Netherlands

The 50% local ownership target for large-scale onshore renewable electricity generation in the Climate Agreement in the Netherlands is a non-binding target but needs to be further elaborated through spatial policy frameworks. In the final licensing of renewable energy projects, there is no hard check on whether there is actual participation. Municipalities often settle for the commitment of project developers to issue a bond and establish an environment fund to develop projects in the immediate vicinity. Depending on the confidence of the official and councillor, different approaches are taken in different municipalities and, in this sense, there is arbitrariness as to whether you get a foothold as an energy cooperative. It is unclear whether such arbitrariness can be quickly resolved through a national legislative process that will soon take five years. Through policy, communication and clear images, you often have more impact.

Equal access to the electricity market is reasonably OK in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, a more pragmatic approach to policy on renewable energy communities is possible because the barriers for entering the electricity market are very low. In the Netherlands, the law on energy market liberalisation is very well structured, regulating activities and not parties. From this perspective, we can also explain why report D7.1 highlighted that the Netherlands has a limited elaboration of European legislation, but at the same time has a well-developed enabling framework. Because the liberalisation of the electricity market was well established, the cooperative movement did not have to be overly concerned with elaborating legislation. Instead, the cooperative movement could well focus on supporting the practice.

There is currently a problem for heat in neighbourhoods where residents start an initiative. This is because there is a perverse dynamic in which a citizen initiative does something of an economic activity, e.g. as a cooperative, the municipality sees the initiative as a market player. Then the municipality also wants to give other parties equal access to the neighbourhood through e.g. a tender. So: If a cooperative sets up an initiative, they shoot themselves in the foot because by

doing so they simultaneously pave the way for competitors. In the current Heat Act, such citizen initiatives should be defined differently (as also provided for in European regulations), namely as a different kind of party that needs a different kind of access to the market because they are part of the neighbourhood.

In the Netherlands, the new Energy Act has understood energy sharing as "being allowed to supply without a licence". It is difficult to assess the impact of this because, at the same time, you still have to comply with the rights and obligations of a supplier. At the moment, it seems that only the cost of applying for a supply licence (around €1,500) is saved.

Citizens' initiatives need to professionalise at some point if they want to increase scale and have a say in renewable energy development. If you want upscale and establish renewable energy communities at urban or regional level, you need not only investors but also development money ('finance-to-develop'). To professionalise, you need funds to hire external staff or pay people in the cooperative. Energy cooperatives in Hart van Brabant and North-East Brabant are working hard to acquire such funds.

Grant/funding streams should be aligned, e.g.: start-up grant, planning grant, development loan and then funding or guarantee for equity (heat). It is important that the funds also effectively go through the cooperative so that there is professionalisation within the cooperative. If you let money flow through the cooperative, you build capacity within the cooperative to take ownership and responsibility. The Association of Energy Cooperatives Hart van Brabant, for example, has closed an agreement with the municipalities that if they are asked to carry out a project, they must be compensated at cost price.

Subsidies are necessary when starting a citizens' initiative (just as a lot of subsidies go to other startups) but further development towards a sustainable business model is needed. However, energy cooperatives also solve many other societal issues because they are locally anchored, have a network and solve problems much more efficiently than consultants. Subsidies (or commissioning from the community) are justified for such activities.

Summary thematic workshop

Sara Tachelet Energy (REScoop.eu) presented the *Energy Community Platform*: https://energycommunityplatform.eu/

Launched recently (during EUSEW 2022), the platform aims to promote community energy projects and accelerate the transition to energy democracy. The platform was developed for citizens interested in community energy or involved in energy communities.

The platform is managed by REScoop.eu but was funded through several EU projects (ECCO, Compile, COME RES) and the Tides Foundation (Patagonia).

The platform offers practical resources (e.g. tools, reports, good practices, ...) tailored to start-up and established energy communities (resources) and provides information on relevant experts (advice may be remunerated) (experts) and other energy communities (map and fact

sheet) (communities). The "development stage test" allows an energy community to get an indication of the development stage it is in and provides tailor-made information (indicators, roadmap). The "sustainability scorecard" allows energy communities to evaluate themselves in terms of environmental, economic and social outcomes. The results are presented in a visually appealing scorecard. Recommendations are also given for further development, illustrated with good practices.

You can register for free on the platform. Upon registration, a profile is created. Based on the profile, customised search results are delivered. New resources as well as experts and energy communities can be notified on the platform, with validation and quality control by REScoop.eu.

Next steps

The morning and afternoon sessions were each concluded by Erika Meynaerts (VITO) with an overview of the next project steps.

This meeting was the last meeting of the Flemish/Dutch country desk. The project will be concluded at the end of February 2023 with a **final conference on 31/01/2023 (Brussels)** to which all members of the country desk are invited. The formal invitation will follow via e-mail.

In the coming months, country desk members can expect the following reports:
- Results from the stakeholder survey in 9 COME RES countries.
- Report of the EUSEW event "1 municipality - 1 REC" (30/09, Brussels).
- Roadmaps for transfer of good practices for 5 target regions (Italy, Latvia, Germany, Spain, Poland).
- Business models for 4 target regions (Germany, Latvia, Italy and Poland).
- Action plans for development of RECs in 4 target regions (Portugal, Spain, Poland, Italy).
- Final policy report and recommendations.

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