

Energy Transition in the Northern Netherlands: seeking a balance between top-down and bottom-up initiatives

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Eight cities

- ▶ 2 lighthouse cities
- ▶ 6 follower cities
- ▶ Horizon 2020 project
- ▶ Energy transition in urban areas

34 partners



- ▶ In totaal: 9 gemeenten, 5 universiteiten, 4 kennisinstituten, 4 woningcorporaties, 4 SME's, 3 energiebedrijven en 1 bouwbedrijf
- ▶ In Groningen: Hanze, RUG, Gemeente Groningen, Grunneger Power, TNO, New Energy Coalition, Warmtestad, Waarborg Vastgoed, Nijestee, CGI en Sustainable Buildings

MAKING-CITY

- Positive Energy Districts (PEDs): positive total annual energy balance
- Technical + Spatial/Social aspect

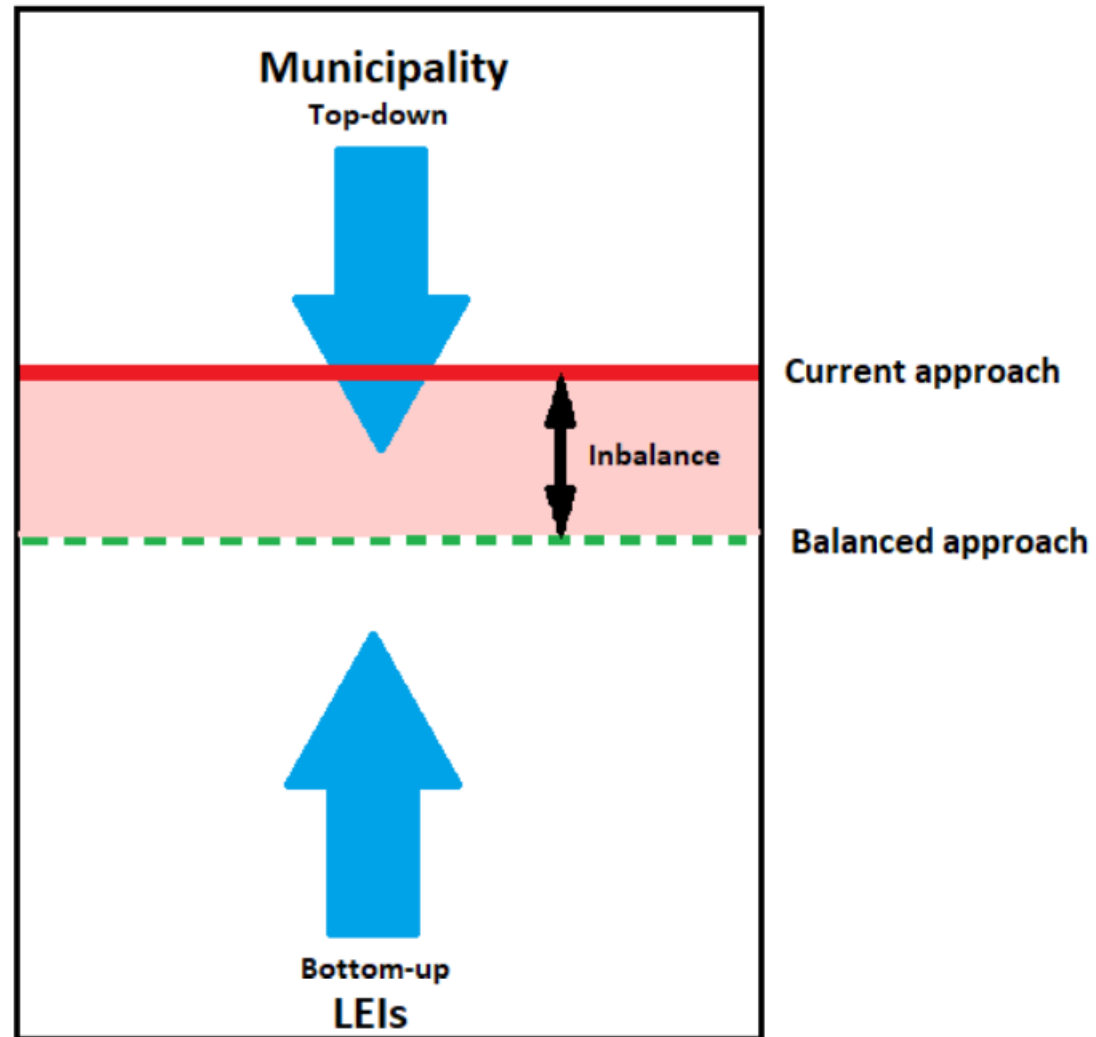


Social aspect of energy transition in urban areas

Groningen districts:

- different stages of energy transition
- different approaches of citizen engagement processes
- in some districts, initiatives formed by residents, in others established and facilitated by the municipality
- usually, the needs and desires not solely on sustainable energy, but on enhancing the overall well-being
- each district has its own challenges and needs a different approach
- Lack of balance between top down and bottom up processes

Local Energy Initiatives (LEIs)



Research Goal

To gain insights into how a more balanced approach can be achieved,
by investigating the interests, barriers and expectations of the Groningen local citizen initiatives.

Research Study Methodology

- Qualitative research – thematic analysis
- Semi-structured interviews
 - members of the municipality of Groningen,
 - Grunneger Power (a local energy intermediary)
 - four local energy initiatives

Need and expectation gaps have been identified and potential solutions have been explored.



Research Results

Theme
The need for professional support
Mutual ignorance creates a mismatch in expectations
The flourishing of LEIs by creating certainty
Friction about professionalization
The importance of communication and collaboration

1. Need for Professional Support



“To stimulate initiatives, it would be very nice if there is already some kind of plan or some kind of signpost, a route plan like: ‘If you are going to set up an initiative, you have to take this, this and this into account, a kind of manual for local initiatives’.”

- ▶ Higher scale energy co-operatives or organizations (such as “Energie van Ons” and “GREK”) can play an intermediary role between the municipality and grassroots initiatives.
- ▶ Need for a fixed municipal representative with whom a LEI can build a long-term relationship of trust.

2. Mutual ignorance creates mismatched expectations

“The municipality is very much geared to programs and initiatives are not. Initiatives sometimes float there and then there again. And those two cultures don't work well with each other.”

- ▶ LEIs expect the municipality to take the lead by giving them a clear role.
- ▶ The municipality seems to have a wait-and-see attitude and expect them to become more professional before delegating responsibilities.

3. Need for clarity

“I mean, does this mean that we as citizens should start our own plans? And for example, if we want to make a local heat storage, that we as citizens have to do this? Or does it mean that there is still a possibility that we can get support from the municipality for doing this?”

- ▶ LEIs need (timely) clarity about whether their project ideas are considered feasible by the municipality.
- ▶ LEIs aim at being regarded as a serious partner within the local energy transition context, for instance by participating in the formulation of the municipal district energy plans.

4. The desired degree of professionalization



"We just do it as volunteers, little by little in the evenings, a little bit at the end of the working day... In our group, everyone works full-time, or almost full-time, so yes, we have sometimes better things to do, so that also makes it very vulnerable."

- ▶ Several LEIs express the ambition of becoming more professional, by indicating aspects such as 'public relationships', 'a newsletter' or 'the opportunity to train someone internally'
- ▶ The desired degree of professionalization varies per LEI

5. The importance of communication and collaboration



“And on the other hand, I think, if there is a neighbourhood initiative, to facilitate that in such a way that neighbourhood initiatives come into contact with each other to learn from each other, to avoid having to reinvent the wheel.”

- ▶ A need for communication and collaboration with the municipality, but also among LEIs.
- ▶ Need for a platform on which information on district level about e.g. energy consumption data.

Recommendations

- ▶ Development of a LEIs professional support framework by the municipality, in which the role of intermediary organizations is specified. Various LEIs profiles can be considered, to allow for flexibility regarding the content and the ways that this support is provided.
- ▶ Creation of a clear municipal point of contact for LEIs.

It is essential that both municipality and LEIs mutually understand their roles within the local energy transition context:

- ▶ Clear communication of the LEIs' vision and mission to the municipality. Intermediaries role.
- ▶ Incorporation in the district energy plans, of a mutually developed roadmap specifying the citizen engagement approach and the role of the corresponding LEI.
- ▶ Mutual agreements between each LEI and the municipality about the degree of professionalization expected by them, in relation to their vision and mission.
- ▶ Encouragement of collaboration and knowledge sharing between LEIs, e.g. via structural consultations among various LEIs representatives, the municipality and intermediary organisations.

Thank you

Get in touch for more information!



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