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Changing the future of energy: civil society as a main player in renewable energy generation

EESC Study

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Research questions:

- What is **the role of decentralised civic energy** in the energy transition;
- What is the current level of civic involvement: simply information, consultation or **active producers of energy**?
- Are EU, national and regional policies and strategies specifically aimed at **empowering civic renewable energy generation**?

The study was **NOT** about:

- Renewable energy in general;
- Judging or comparing individual countries' progress;
- Technological or economic challenges.



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Methodology:

- Desk research;
- Interviews with EU level stakeholders;
- Missions to six EU Member States selected for a balanced geographical representation and different implementation levels:
 - Germany (March 2014)
 - Poland (April 2014)
 - France (April 2014)
 - United Kingdom (May 2014)
 - Lithuania (May 2014)
 - Bulgaria (July 2014)
- Stakeholder workshop in Brussels, September 2014.



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Civic Energy:

Decentralized renewable energy generation by citizens, communities, local authorities, charities, NGOs, farmers, cooperatives or SMEs, creating a new stream of value that can stay within the region and contribute to local socio-economic development.





STUDY FINDINGS





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“The frame of mind”

- **Highly motivated civil society** in all of the visited countries, aware of the opportunities for local socio-economic development offered by renewable energy.
- **Frustrations with bureaucratic hurdles** and with the non-recognition of civic energy by policy makers, and **anxiety about current policy reforms**.
- No consistently implemented, targeted policy support for civic renewable energy at any level.



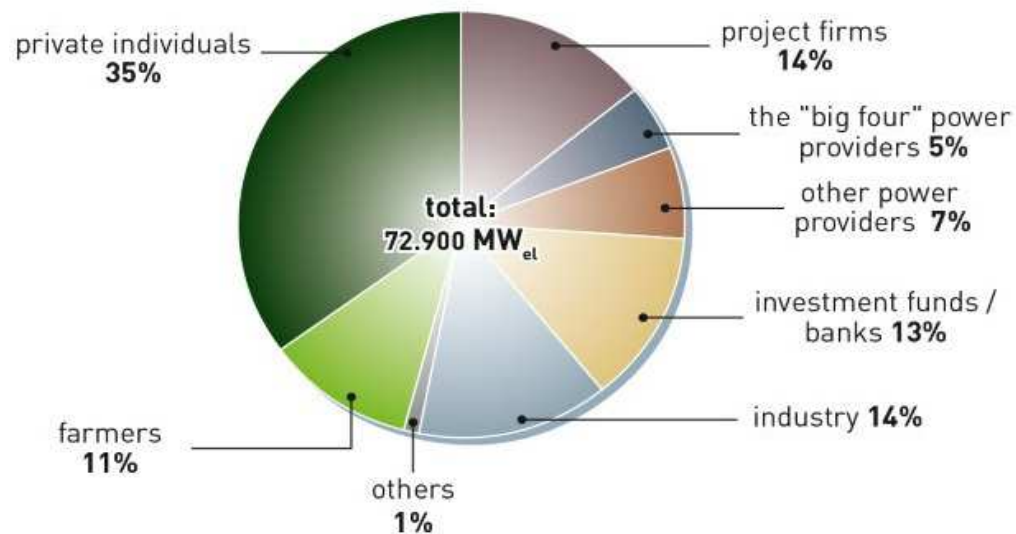
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A strong case for civic energy:

- **Local acceptance** of renewable energy infrastructure;
- Major driver of **the energy transition** – contributing with human resources, funds and creativity;
- Shared **local socio-economic benefits and incomes** that stay within the communities;
- Impetus for community **cooperation and innovation.**



An example: the German *Energiewende*:



Ownership distribution of installed renewable electricity generation capacity in Germany (2012).

Source: Blog "German Energy Transition"

In 2014:

- More than 35% of electricity from renewable sources.
- More than 1000 energy cooperatives.
- Around 50 % of the currently installed capacity (73 GW) are civic energy installations.



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Favourable policy frameworks:

- **Long-term, stable renewable energy policy frameworks** that provide investment security;
- **Civic renewable energy integrated as explicit priority** into energy planning, regional and rural development policies at all levels.





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Simple administrative procedures:

- Simple, fast, transparent and affordable **administrative procedures**;
- **One-stop shops** offering guidance in the planning process through to deployment;
- Reasonable costs and waiting times for **grid connection**;
- Renewable electricity of the magnitudes of civic energy should be **exempt from procedures creating disproportionate burden**, such as direct marketing obligations.



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Effective support mechanisms

- **Feed-in priority** for electricity from renewable sources.
- **Feed-in tariffs** should be the main form of support for civic renewable energy.
- **Net-metering** for civic power production.
- **Tenders and auctions** can put a disproportionate burden, or even exclude small energy producers.



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Grid development and management

- **Invest in grid renovation and improvements** necessary to keep up the pace of renewables' roll-out.
- Accelerate the development of **smart grids** to optimise energy management, reduce peak loads and allow for a higher share of renewables.



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Participatory and transparent policy dialogue

- Design, implement and review renewable energy policies in **continuous dialogue with civil society**.
- Launch a transparent and objective policy dialogue on the **long-term costs and benefits of the energy transition**, and on their fair distribution.
- The **social consequences of the energy transition** must be adequately addressed by strategies to help mitigate adverse effects on jobs and on socially weak households.



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