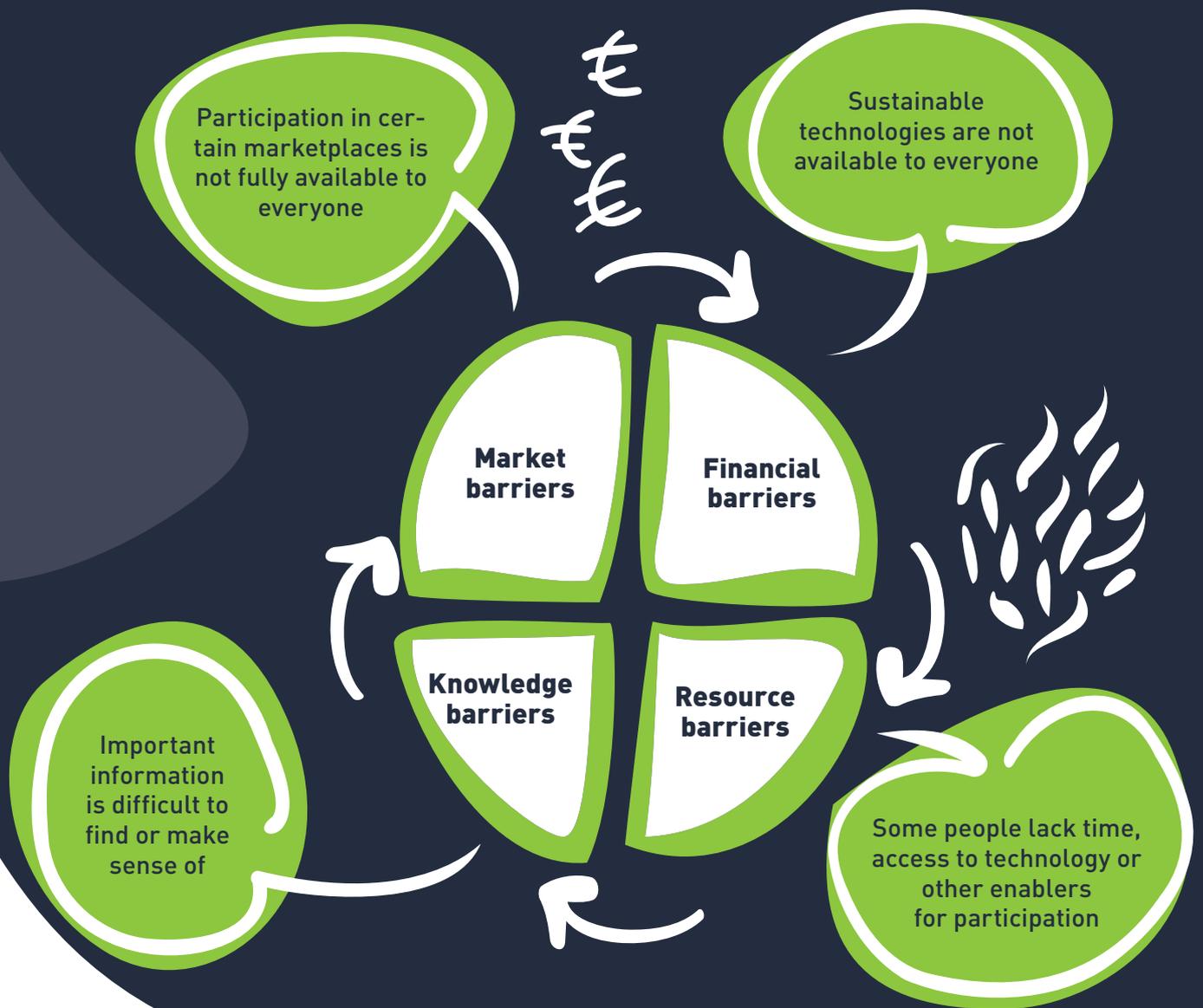


Citizens can take a more or less active role in the energy transition. These “levels of engagement” are far from static, being sensitive to changes in local conditions prompted by concrete actions. For example, targeted awareness campaigns can lead to collective activism or even advocacy phenomena.

Barriers against energy citizenship

To successfully support energy citizenship, it is first necessary to understand the barriers it faces. A starting point is to acknowledge diversity and people’s individual circumstances. Not everyone can afford, or wishes to contribute to the same extent, or in the same ways, to the energy transition.

There is a complex interplay of factors affecting **the ability of citizens** to actively pursue energy action. There could be, for example, physical barriers to reforming a heat system at home, or to installing solar power in a building. Some citizens may not possess the energy use flexibility to allow them to meaningfully contribute to demand response actions. Moreover, participation in certain marketplaces might not be fully available to individual customers yet, regardless of their motivation. Some citizens could be excluded from sustainable technology-based actions due to affordability reasons. Others may lack awareness of, access to, or ability to make sense of information. Finally, not everyone has the time or the means to be able to effectively participate or to be fully committed and engaged.



A second category of energy citizenship barriers has to do with the **citizens' willingness** to engage. This is linked to their drivers and motivations for energy action, or lack of it. Not all people may be interested in a specific type of energy citizenship, and some may be interested in none, considering the information they have or the value system they follow. Those values could indeed be opposed to those guiding the dominant energy policies of today. Such citizens should not be marginalized, nor their views dismissed. Instead, the supporting premises for such orientations should be studied and understood.

A third category of barriers has to do with **conflicts**. Both individual and collective actions towards decarbonisation may have unintended negative consequences on others. This could constitute a significant barrier to consolidating energy citizenship actions

and to broader collective engagement. To illustrate – not every household is the same and even people within households have different priorities and ways of living. It is important to understand potential sources of conflict and reach consensus on any compromises that need to be made.

Who are energy citizens? Anyone can be an energy citizen. But at the same time, energy citizens can also have professional roles in government, private sector, non-profits, and other institutions with capacity to act towards the clean energy transition. The level of awareness and advocacy on clean energy issues are in principle traits with significant importance for people acting in these roles. Nevertheless, energy citizenship is also very often manifested in an informal manner, in the personal sphere or at a voluntary basis in the context of civic or communal activities.



Energy citizenship in everyday challenges

Below we highlight three examples of everyday life energy challenges and of citizenship actions that in those circumstances could make a positive impact towards the clean energy transition.

ENERGY-RELATED CHALLENGE

CIVIC ACTION

A town council is using public data to identify areas of low-income families or older residents – especially those who inhabit unmodernised homes that waste more energy than newer homes. **The council wants to make grants available for energy renovations, but often finds that the uptake of the financial aid is lower than expected.** Common reasons are that data and information that would allow people to find out for themselves about the long-term benefits, as well as how to get help when needed in managing the renovation work, are often poorly signposted and confusingly written.

CITIZENSHIP STRATEGY

“Third” or “fourth” places are spaces away from home or from work, where people can meet and collaborate. Examples are libraries, communal centres, and even “localised” online spaces such as Facebook pages. These environments are known to facilitate knowledge sharing, and civic actions. Approaches that have been successfully used are increasing people’s literacy on energy and data so that they have the knowledge to find and solve their own energy issues, as well as making the data and information more accessible and understandable to the public. **Town councils could cooperate with these citizen-run spaces to tackle home energy renovation challenges faced by older residents and low-income families.**

ENERGY MARKETS

A family of four has seen their electricity bills increase over time and are seeking opportunities for reducing their monthly costs. They are motivated to change their energy behaviour, but do not know how to optimize it. A quick market research also revealed that **monetary compensation for demand response services is reserved to much larger energy customers.**

A recent European directive formalised the concept of “citizen energy communities” – CECs. Citizens who join CECs engage in collective energy actions, directly benefiting from their knowledge pool. CECs offer services to and on behalf of their members, which are leveraged by their shared energy capacity. **Joining CECs allows citizens to access otherwise barred market opportunities, such as those from demand response services.**

VALUE FROM DATA

A small business has decided to engage in energy improvements at their head offices as means to obtain long-term net financial gains. **They are confronted with various investment possibilities and the need to identify the best value for money** for this project. Due to the size of their facility, they would rather not engage with an energy consultancy, which could be a long, expensive process, taking away the immediate opportunity for energy action. In addition, they are interested in **capitalizing on further opportunities brought about by digitalisation**, but do not have the internal resources to do so.

Many public authorities, universities, and non-governmental organizations maintain online platforms that support techno-economic analyses of energy investments. For example, a solar atlas can inform on the solar potential across a city’s rooftops. Free digital tools are also available that assess viability of energy efficiency measures in homes and buildings, as well as of renewable energy projects. **Such tools and platforms, invariably collecting and processing data from multiple dispersed sources, could be used to aid the energy decision-making of small businesses.** Automated remote energy management can additionally be deployed, as a means to expand value via awareness with minimal local disruption.

EMBRACE

CONSENSUS



STRATEGY

COLLABORATION

DIVERSITY

CO-CREATION

Practical recommendations

While energy citizenship manifestations have grown across Europe, they have not yet been formalised into a specific framework nor explicitly promoted via structuring policies. Policy makers will have a crucial role in consolidating this trend, by establishing lines of action that could be followed to improve the conditions for energy citizenship to emerge, i.e. to make local environments more favourable to active and collective participation by diverse people. *Energy citizenship is a multifaceted phenomenon for which the levels of engagement and orientation could be significantly influenced if the appropriate policies are set in place.* Some key principles of action for policy makers are:

- **Embrace a collaborative approach:** It is often misunderstood that energy citizenship is exclusive to individuals and the residential environment. In fact, it is an all-encompassing *transdisciplinary* partnership, which may involve a broad range of people and communities, many types of organisations (research institutes, SMEs, NGOs) and the public sector. Likewise, it is a widely *multidisciplinary* undertaking, requiring diverse knowledge for developing the understanding on how to build favourable environments for active citizen engagement;

- **Seek consensus around energy citizenship concepts:** The very nature and features of energy citizenship are widely disputed and/or misunderstood and have not yet been fully clarified. In times of urgent climate action, this is hampering the build-up of collective approaches. Policy-makers could have an important role in establishing consensus within the relevant stakeholders so to formalise definitions that could serve the energy transition;
- **Embrace social innovation as the missing link of the energy transition:** It is unlikely that top-down policies driven by technological evidence and markets alone will instigate decisive, collective citizen action; a new breed of complementary transition policies should have a bottom-up nature and be designed based on novel participatory processes within communities;
- **Acknowledge the diversity of citizens, their different motivations and preferences:** Not all citizens are the same, nor do they react the same way in response to similar stimuli; technology studies have been traditionally assumption-based and explicitly omitted this important notion, which should be urgently formalised as a means to prevent exclusion phenomena.

Key messages

Collaboration

Involve a diverse range of individuals and collectives in the civic, public, and private spheres

Take into account the multidisciplinary nature of energy citizenship

Consensus

Contribute to clarify energy citizenship concepts and features

Design policy conventions in cooperation with key stakeholders

Co-creation

Recognise social innovation as the missing link in the energy transition

Promote bottom-up, participatory, and action-based policies

Diversity

Acknowledge different citizen responses to technology and market-based stimuli

Develop targeted and differentiated policies





FURTHER READING

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