



Policy brief collection

Enhancing local participation to drive the energy transition



**Shared
Green
Societies**

A European Forum connecting
practice, policy and research

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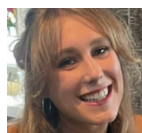
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Highlights

There is growing recognition that the achievement of low-carbon energy transitions requires everyone to play their part. Indeed, the breadth of topics and sectors covered in European Union energy policies demonstrates the need for a range of societal actors to be involved in actions, including, for example, citizens, businesses, industries, and non-profit organisations.

Yet, there are challenges affecting current participation approaches, which in turn hinder the effective involvement of these different societal actors. In particular, this Policy Brief outlines three specific challenges which act as barriers to achieving (local) just energy transitions: the presence of one-size-fits-all participation approaches; insufficient support for alternative local governance mechanisms; and a lack of trust that policymaking considers insights gained through participation.

Drawing upon experiences of, and best practices from, the EU Horizon 2020 project, SHARED GREEN DEAL, this Policy Brief sets out four recommendations for how participation can be enhanced to better support sustainable energy transitions:

- Recognise the range of actors and initiatives that support sustainable societal change, and broaden the concept of governance beyond top-down policymaking.
- Embed flexibility within policy approaches to enable informed, adaptable, and contextualised implementation.
- Ensure strong, continuous, and structured support for local initiatives that foster opportunities for direct interaction with sustainable interventions.
- Support policy initiatives that fund long-lasting local participatory processes.

Policy audience Members of the
European Parliament, including
assistants and policy advisors.

1. Introduction

This Policy Brief is produced as part of the activities of the Shared Green Societies Forum, a new European forum designed to connect evidence, practice, and policy, and to bring together the actors leading on the ground with those shaping ideas and strategies. The Shared Green Societies Forum was launched in January 2026, building on the success of the Horizon 2020-funded SHARED GREEN DEAL project, which uses a transdisciplinary approach to stimulate shared actions on the European Green Deal. This Policy Brief builds on the project's outcomes, in particular a series of 'social experiments' on six key topics of the Green Deal¹, in which local stakeholders were involved through a range of participatory approaches and Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) tools.

In particular, this Brief utilises insights from the two experiment streams related to Europe's energy transition, namely SHARED GREEN DEAL's 'Clean Energy'² and 'Efficient Renovations'³ streams. Specifically, the Clean Energy experiments (Poland, Spain, Denmark, and the UK) undertook energy envisioning activities with local citizens and professionals, during which participants shared their visions of sustainable and prosperous futures, resulting in a total of 21 community visioning workshops; whereas the Efficient Renovations experiments (Lithuania, Hungary, Spain, Ireland) created four Knowledge Networks, involving over 150 citizens and professionals and 50+ interactive events, to develop practical renovation know-how. All the experiments were led by local municipalities or non-governmental organisations.

We begin this Brief by reiterating the position that, across European regions, certain communities and households feel insufficiently supported to participate in the energy transition, reflecting structural inequalities in the distributional impacts of the energy transition. At the same time, we observe that energy governance has been criticised because of tensions between more inclusive participatory models and top-down approaches that do not allow citizens to be meaningfully involved in emerging energy systems. These tensions can increase scepticism, influence people's perception of fairness, and undermine trust in governance actors. Something therefore needs to change, and we argue that lessons can be taken from the aforementioned two energy experiment streams in SHARED GREEN DEAL, to help avoid a widening gap between citizens and EU institutions.

Such insights are supported by wider empirical research, which has continually reiterated how participation constitutes a promising approach for democratic sustainability transformations⁴. Participation can take multiple forms; participatory practices can be conceptualised as existing on a spectrum, whereby the lowest level of participation involves top-down, one-way communication from governance actors to different societal actors, whilst higher levels of participation include the active involvement of societal actors in transition activities or decision-making processes through dialogue, co-creation and ultimately two-way exchange⁵. This Brief is advocating for these latter, higher-level forms of participation, which also tend to recognise that participation should involve a much fuller range of societal actors and roles (e.g. businesses, non-government organisations, community groups), rather than just thinking about how to engage citizens.

The purpose of this Policy Brief is to identify relevant challenges (and related recommendations) inhibiting effective local participation. The identification of these challenges, and subsequent addressing of them, can help achieve energy transitions that are inclusive, fair, well-resourced and place-based.⁶

1 Clean Energy, Circular Economy, Efficient Renovations, Sustainable Mobility, Sustainable Food, and Preserving Biodiversity.

2 Gray, E. K., Rohse, M., Fahy, F., Jost, C., 2025. Community visioning for just, clean energy futures in Europe. In: Robison, R. and Royston, S. (eds.): Findings and Recommendations from the SHARED GREEN DEAL Social Experiments. Cambridge: SHARED GREEN DEAL. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15270128>.

3 Foulds, C., Royston, S., Crowther, A., Aggeli, A., Robison, R., Noreña Ospina, M., Wieser, P., 2025. Bringing together citizens and professionals to develop know-how for energy efficient renovations. In: Robison, R. and Royston, S. (eds.): Findings and Recommendations from the SHARED GREEN DEAL Social Experiments. Cambridge: SHARED GREEN DEAL. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15270137>.

4 Radtke, J., Renn, O., 2024. Participation in Energy Transitions: A Comparison of Policy Styles. *Energy Research & Social Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103743>.

5 Rowe, G., Frewer, L., 2000. Public Participation Methods: A Framework for Evaluation. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 25(1), 3-29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016224390002500101>.

6 As part of the project's activities, IEEP and ARU organised a roundtable on 24 June at the European Parliament entitled *Local participation in European energy transition: An MEP Roundtable*. During the event, the first draft of

2. Policy Context

To ensure effective governance of energy policies and deliver successful decarbonisation, local communities and local authorities have been recognised as playing a crucial role in meeting EU goals while simultaneously responding to specific local challenges. Since the launch of the Green Deal, for instance, initiatives such as [Local Energy Communities](#) and the [EU Mission for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities](#) have been strongly promoted, empowering local stakeholders to drive decarbonisation in their territories. The European Green Deal also mandated Member States to adopt appropriate measures to involve stakeholders in the drafting of the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs), in which national governments outlined how they intend to reach the 2030 climate targets. The same requirement was made for the draft of the Social Climate Plans (SCP), currently ongoing, in the context of the new [Emission Trading System on road transport and buildings](#) (ETS2) and the allocation of the Social Climate Fund (SCF), which accompanies the new system to mitigate the impacts on low- and middle-income households.

The [Citizens Energy Package](#) builds further on this approach by breaking down the barriers that prevent citizens from playing a prominent role in the production, consumption, and saving of clean energy, while addressing energy poverty and supporting a just transition. Building on this package and the [AccelerateEU communication](#) (a set of actions to respond to the energy crisis stemming from the conflict in the Middle East), the Commission has issued a [series of recommendations](#) to Member

this policy brief was presented, and an open discussion took place with MEPs, assistants, policy advisors, and other experts from think tanks, local authorities, and Civil Society Organisations. The discussions addressed the following questions: What strategies can best enhance the participation of local stakeholders in delivering the objectives of European energy policies and, importantly, in ensuring a just transition for all? How can EU legislation better reflect the diverse local realities that shape energy use (e.g. residential heating), instead of adopting the one-size-fits-all technology-focused solutions? How can MEPs enable participation of local communities in energy transition policies and initiatives? What specifically should be remembered for the recently published Citizen Energy Package, related recommendations, and the Electrification Action Plan? Some of the insights were integrated into the development of this brief. See more in the Annex.

States. These aim to strengthen the resilience and independence of Europe's energy system, including measures to improve consumers' awareness of energy contracts and protect vulnerable consumers, particularly those at risk of disconnections. These also aim to accelerate the uptake of energy communities, which are considered key for achieving EU renewable energy targets but have fallen short of the objectives⁷.

On the other hand, the [European Grids Package](#), which includes four new documents⁸, was designed to strengthen energy infrastructure across the EU, in particular by improving coordination among Member States, providing more efficient tools for cost-sharing, but also ensuring fairer benefit-sharing and enhanced participation. Regarding the latter, the Commission has released a [Toolbox for public inclusion for renewable projects](#), which provides national Governments with best practices on how to increase participation and thus public support for policies. Relatedly, the [Electrification Action Plan](#), which is a recent comprehensive strategy to make the EU the first electro-powered continent, establishes an ambitious electrification target (46% by 2040) by promoting a shift in industry, transport and heating away from fossil fuels. The aim of this Plan is to lower energy costs, enhance competitiveness and reduce reliance on imported fuels. Finally, the next [Multiannual Financial Framework \(MFF\) 2028-2034](#) will be key to enabling all EU objectives, with Member States currently developing their National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPP), where they outline investment plans and reforms. Overall, these initiatives create potential opportunities for a more bottom-up approach, strengthening local participation and helping to address existing procedural shortcomings.

⁷ See more: [Special report 10/2026: Energy communities – Potential yet to be fulfilled](#), 2026. The European Court of Auditors.

⁸ A revision of the Trans-European Networks for Energy (TEN-E) Regulation, a separate proposal to accelerate permit-granting procedures and two other guidance documents for Member States.

3. Policy challenges

In this section, challenges related to participation, and the impacts on policy processes, are outlined. The challenges presented are informed by experiences from (or motivations underpinning) the SHARED GREEN DEAL's two energy social experiments as well as the current political context.

Challenge 1 ▶ A one-size-fits-all approach fails to capture the complexity of implementing energy transitions.

In many policy areas, but particularly for those concerning the energy transition, a one-size-fits-all approach poses serious limitations for the socio-economic dimensions of the transition. The European Union's Member States and regions have diverse geographical, economic and environmental characteristics, which require targeted approaches in the governance of the transition. As identified in the experiments, specific challenges and needs can vary widely: they may stem from environmental and health conditions, relate to social aspects such as the level of education and local histories, or be linked to everyday habitual routines and social norms. In the Clean Energy experiments specifically, it was certainly found that asking citizens for their views and energy visions of the future⁹ was likely to help local authorities meet specific objectives, as these views reflected actual local lived experiences and priorities.

Carrying out the energy transition requires deep, tailored approaches that affect how the energy

system itself is organised, and that includes people's relationships with it. It is therefore critical to remember that lived experiences and socio-cultural norms will vary from place to place. Furthermore, a town's local place identity may be associated with a beautiful landscape, which may be at odds with e.g. a new onshore wind development, or its identity may be tied up in heritage, which could be a significant barrier for e.g. a town-wide external insulation programme of its historic housing that has a certain aesthetic appearance. But on the other side of things, a town may have a centuries-old association with energy industries (e.g. coal mining), which could potentially provide opportunities for future underground energy system developments (e.g. an industrial pivot to geothermal). Needless to say, each locality needs careful consideration. Transformative change can never be achieved through high-level, generalisable interventions, such as generic information campaigns or national-wide policies that are not sufficiently flexible to local needs. A participatory model emphasises the great value of local knowledge in addressing equity issues¹⁰.

Challenge 2 ▶ Insufficient support for local efforts in the governance of the energy policies.

One of the major barriers identified in the experiments was how the lack of sustained institutional and financial support for community initiatives (and the people involved) risked undermining their long-lasting impact. Local authorities often did not have at their disposal sufficient financial and administrative capacity to steer the transition¹¹, and therefore often struggled to identify the most relevant actors and the means to ensure their participation in policy governance. Indeed, for community-owned energy projects, grassroots implementation is often managed by volunteers, with no significant support given by local authorities. Even when local authorities are committed to community-based approaches, outcomes may fall short due to limited capacity.

9 "Community visioning is an inclusive, collaborative process that enables a group of people to come together to imagine the future of their community – in this case, a clean energy future." Definition from: Gray, E. K., 2025. Community Visioning: A Guide to Co-creating Clean Energy Futures. Cambridge: SHARED GREEN DEAL. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17086736>.

10 Radtke, J., Renn, O., 2024. Participation in Energy Transitions.

11 Bonfert, B., Nielsen, H.Ø., Pedersen, A.B., 2024. Taking first steps so that others can run – functions and limitations of governing the local energy transition. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 26(6), 608–622. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2024.2380277>.

For the Efficient Renovations stream in particular, the municipalities and local non-governmental organisations that we worked closely with frequently highlighted how crucial the technical and financial support provided by the project's funding scheme was in delivering successful outcomes. To be clear, this was not only about money, but also the mentoring and planning capacities that the consortium provided the local teams with.

Literature on energy communities reaffirms our project experiences, given how securing funding for the establishment and development of energy communities remains a struggle, which can exacerbate inequalities across European regions and citizens within the community.¹² In some cases, these community energy initiatives rely on creative financing models (e.g. public funds, crowdfunding, cooperative shares) to finance projects, while ensuring economic stability in the community. Other cases illustrate the strength of cooperative models where residents are directly involved in decision-making and energy education. However, overall, unlocking investments remains difficult, and legal and governance issues are widespread.¹³

Challenge 3 ► Lack of trust and the perception of an unjust transition.

A lack of trust in policymakers and policymaking institutions can lead to a lack of buy-in and ultimately limited participation in, and perhaps even backlash towards, European policy initiatives. Indeed, in some cases, a lack of trust and the perception of injustices can lead to strong resistance, as seen in France in 2018 with the 'Gilets Jaunes' protests, and

more recently, in the farmer protests across several European countries.

Much of the success of the SHARED GREEN DEAL experiments was built on the bedrock of trust. However, trust and support must be maintained over time (e.g. by ensuring a safe space for dialogue), and just because trust was there at the start, it should never be taken for granted. Trust is difficult to build up, but very easy to quickly lose.¹⁴

As mentioned above, the Social Climate Fund requires EU countries to draft Social Climate Plans (SCP) outlining how they intend to use these funds. While the drafting of the National Energy and Climate Plans revealed significant shortcomings in public participation and non-compliance in how Member States managed the processes¹⁵, the SCPs were expected to offer an opportunity for national governments to improve public participation, as they could serve as a positive example of the benefits of meaningful involvement of local authorities and communities. However, to date, only some Member States appear to have organised adequate public consultations and other forms of stakeholder engagement, which only reiterates that such consultation mechanisms remain insufficiently embedded in policymaking. This is particularly important for policies such as ETS2, which directly affect citizens, especially vulnerable households, due to higher fuel prices resulting from increased costs for fuel suppliers. If people are not properly involved in the process, this could undermine trust and exacerbate perceptions of an unjust transition, as there will inevitably be some losers. Beyond securing sufficient financial resources, the successful implementation of ETS2 requires a community-led approach to provide data, identify investment needs, and ensure that revenues are channelled into appropriate local green projects for which the SCP will be crucial.

12 Energy Cities, Ecorys, TecNALIA and REScoop.eu., 2025. Final report: Territorial Analysis of Decentralised Energy Markets (TANDEM). ESPON 2030 Cooperation Programme. https://www.espon.eu/sites/default/files/2025-10/tandem-final-report_-_policy-brief.pdf.

13 Barrachina i Salleras, O., Verdauger, S., Chafer, M., Granollers, J. M., 2025. ENERGIZE - Review of existing energy communities, ENERGIZE Supporting the clean energy transition of European businesses. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15254329>.

14 Gray, E.K., Fahy, F., Kovács, K., 2025. *Governing the European Green Deal Through Local Social Experiments*. Cambridge: SHARED GREEN DEAL. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16762512>.

15 See for example [Public participation in EU climate governance: the underexploited potential of national energy and climate plans and Public participation in NECPs: Evidence of weak & uneven compliance](#)

4. Policy recommendations

Inclusive and contextualised sustainable energy transitions are not merely a principle of governance; rather, they ensure fair, effective and lasting outcomes for stakeholders across Europe, whilst reinforcing trust in policymakers that decisions are made with their best interests in mind. The

development of meaningful and sustained participation approaches supports the achievement of such transitions. Drawing particularly upon experiences from the SHARED GREEN DEAL local experiments, we present four recommendations for enhanced participation.

Recommendation



Recognise the range of actors and initiatives that support sustainable societal change and broaden the concept of governance beyond top-down policymaking.



We encourage colleagues to challenge existing power dynamics and dominant ways of doing policy work. Community-led actions and local innovation should be acknowledged as key drivers of societal change and as essential contributions to achieving EU climate and energy targets, particularly as they support the participation of a range of social actors within transition activities.

Evidence from the SHARED GREEN DEAL Clean Energy experiment in Granada (Spain): To inform the establishment of energy communities within the city, multiple social events were organised where local people could access information and share their views. Often, established institutions – such as the church and social services – were used to raise awareness of these events, due to their recognition within the community. The nature of the events was informed by needs and preferences of the local community. As a result of these events, the energy communities were developed in alignment with the people and institutions set to be affected by, and benefit from, the intervention.

Recommendation

2



Embed flexibility within policy approaches to enable informed, adaptable and contextualised implementation.

We suggest colleagues establish dynamic terms of reference through dialogue with societal actors. They should ensure that opportunities for dialogue and participation exist both from the early stages of design, and also across extended periods of time to capture shifting experiences, priorities and contexts as energy transitions occur. This prolonged participation and dialogue can be supported by working in deep partnership with key gatekeepers and trusted intermediaries who understand local needs. Whilst this requires a shift away from ‘quick’ solutions, the adoption of a more grounded approach will ensure actions reflect the local contexts and their policy priorities.

Evidence from the SHARED GREEN DEAL experiments: Throughout all the experiments, it became evident that a certain degree of flexibility was essential for local partners to carry out the project’s activities and meet the intended objectives. For example, the core consortium partners only sought to provide a framework for participation, which was tailored locally according to local experts (i.e. the municipalities or NGOs that were partnering with the consortium). Monthly check-ins also had an emphasis on learning from challenges (and even from emerging failures), so that approaches could be regularly iterated, rather than initial plans being rigidly stuck to. Flexibility and adaptation were subsequently consistently recognised as key strengths, enabling partners to respond to unexpected developments and changing circumstances.

Recommendation

3



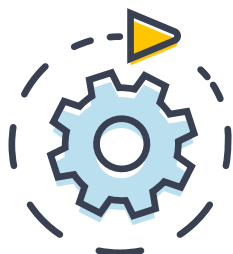
Ensure strong, continuous, and structured support for local initiatives that foster opportunities for direct interaction with sustainable interventions.

We advocate for institutionalising support for local initiatives, such as one-stop-shops and energy communities, within EU legislation, to thereby increase funding and capacity-building measures. For example, by effectively implementing the Citizens Energy Package and systematically integrating the needs and challenges of energy communities into relevant legislative frameworks.

Evidence from the SHARED GREEN DEAL Clean Energy Experiment in Jaywick Sands (UK): In 2024, the community established a new one-stop-shop energy info hub, which provides residents with the opportunity for free, regular information to improve energy efficiency in their homes. In addition, local energy advisors were recruited and trained to further support the community’s energy needs. This programme has been structurally supported and funded by Essex County Council and, following its success, has been rolled out to other locations in Essex too.

Recommendation

4



Support policy initiatives that fund long-lasting local participatory processes.

We believe that European funding should prioritise broadened governance, enable contextualised implementation, and strengthen local initiatives. Ensuring sustained and adequate financial resources allows for the continuous and meaningful participation of stakeholders, and keeps key actors actively engaged throughout the policy cycle. The Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) has played a key role in this regard, providing targeted support to EU regions and workers most affected by the transition and helping to mitigate their socio-economic impacts. As negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) progress, it is crucial to safeguard the Just Transition Mechanism as a core instrument, while maintaining its essential place-based focus. The European Parliament's initiative on the Just Transition Directive in the world of work, calling on the Commission to establish a framework of policy measures for the most affected regions and to increase the just transition funding beyond 2027, marks an important step forward. This momentum must not be lost, but actively upheld and reinforced throughout negotiations. The continuity of such crucial EU programmes would, at the same time, maintain people's trust in EU initiatives, as they would feel supported and accompanied throughout their transition, rather than abandoned midway through.

Evidence from the SHARED GREEN DEAL Clean Energy experiment in Bełchatów (Poland): The local partners involved managed to persuade the regional authorities to allocate the maximum amount of their EU Just Transition Fund resources permitted for supporting non-governmental organisations that, in this case, would assist women in transitioning from coal-mining occupations to green jobs through reskilling and training opportunities. This participatory process made it possible to have an in-depth understanding of how women perceived their role within their communities over the long-term, as well as the skills and conditions required to facilitate their career transition.

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speakers, MEP Bruno Tobback, MEP Brigitte Van den Berg, MEP Benedetta Scuderi, Monika Helak (Reform Institute, a Think Sustainable Europe member), Chris Vrettos (REScoop), and Claire Simpson (Brussels-Capital Region), for their valuable insights. We would also like to thank all other participants for their contributions to the discussion.

This report was reviewed by Chiara Antonelli (Institute for European Environmental Policy, Belgium).

Annex: Insights from the roundtable with MEPs

On 24 June 2026, IEEP and ARU organised a policy roundtable at the European Parliament entitled *Local participation in European energy transition: An MEP Roundtable*. The roundtable was hosted by MEP Bruno Toubback (S&D, Belgium), and was attended by MEPs Brigitte Van den Berg (Renew Europe, Netherlands) and Benedetta Scuderi (Greens/EFA, Italy). During the event, the first draft of this policy brief was presented, and an open discussion took place with MEPs, assistants, policy advisors, and other experts from think tanks, local authorities, and Civil Society Organisations, who validated the content of this work and recognised the recommendations as necessary actions to improve local participation in the energy transition. Some of the insights that emerged were integrated into the development of this brief, whilst others have been summarised in this Annex.

Framing the local transition

The energy transition is seen as one of Europe's genuinely hopeful, forward-looking economic projects, creating opportunities for industrial renewal, new job creation (with over half a million already in the EU energy sector), and prosperity. Contrary to common assumptions, environmental permitting is rarely the main bottleneck for local projects; administrative capacity and funding are bigger obstacles, and early, genuine public participation has the potential to unblock projects. Energy communities, for example, give citizens direct ownership and tangible local benefit rather than a compliance burden. Estimates suggest that household participation in an energy community can save up to €930 per year. However, emerging energy communities face great challenges for their development, which would require EU-level safeguards, such as public registries of grid-connection contracts.

Municipalities' experience

European funding has been crucial for municipalities to stir urban transition. However, direct EU funding is likely to become harder to access, and cities will increasingly need support in identifying alternative sources, including private capital, a mode of working that municipalities are not traditionally equipped for. Two funding models were cited: a standing mechanism financing roughly a dozen projects on climate-relevant topics open to citizen-led ideas, and projects implemented directly by the municipality. Municipalities often participate in projects rather than coordinate them, due to excessive administrative burden, recognising the valuable role of partnerships, including those with inter-city networks.

Intermediaries and facilitators

National federations were cited as an effective intermediary model. For example, a federation working with government-backed revolving funds to proactively reach households for renovation and energy-community support can generate far higher uptake than top-down approaches (a model that is also encouraged by the Commission in the Action Plan for Energy Communities). Horizon Europe National Contact Points and bridging organisations convening researchers, industry, MEPs and Commission officials were also cited, with MEPs, however, often being the hardest stakeholders to bring to the table. The Committee of the Regions was also noted as a facilitator in its own right, being mandated with realising opinions on EU files, and it was argued that local and regional authorities should be more deeply involved in the design, not just the implementation, of energy policy.

Benefit-sharing and minimum common standards

Mandatory benefit-sharing in the Grids Package was welcomed by participants, as a first step to ensure a better redistribution of the projects' economic benefits with the affected local communities. This, however, will require improvements throughout negotiations as pushed by the European Parliament, but is facing reluctance among more conservative Member States. Germany was cited as a cautionary example: despite a strong citizen-energy movement,

benefit-sharing has been implemented differently in each federal state, creating a fragmented patchwork that undermines a level playing field – from required municipal payments in some states to none in others. A strong, common EU-level minimum standard was argued to enable rather than weaken simplification.

While 27 Member States cannot apply identical rules, the EU should establish shared definitions distinguishing engagement, public participation and benefit-sharing, so all stakeholders – including citizens who cannot attend meetings – share a common understanding. Benefit-sharing was linked to justice both procedurally (genuine engagement) and distributionally (sharing project profits).

Competition and social justice within energy communities

Citizen and cooperative energy initiatives are in direct competition with for-profit energy interests, which actively lobby to weaken benefit-sharing and cooperative provisions. While energy communities are not inherently disadvantaged within electricity market reform, the broader transition, including network tariffs that citizens cannot opt out of, carries real distributive impacts. Instruments like the Just Transition Fund and Social Climate Fund exist, but operate too indirectly for citizens to connect benefits back to EU policy. The link between energy communities and social justice is most often lost in practice during implementation; therefore, more work is needed to integrate social- and transition-focused framings.

Looking ahead

The discussion highlighted a shift from questions of methods toward questions of procedural justice: whose voices are included and at what stage, whether participation processes are open or continuous, and how multi-level governance can build trust during a period of uncertainty. The *Societal Readiness* pilot under Horizon Europe (allocating about €200–300 million for 27 projects) represents a positive step in this direction, as it requires projects in the climate, energy and mobility sectors to consider societal needs when developing innovations. A closing plea was made not to lose this procedural richness in the next Horizon Europe framework, despite the growing emphasis on competitiveness.

Ultimately, the goal is for citizens to become genuine owners and active protagonists of the transition. Yet citizen-led ideas continue to face many of the same barriers identified throughout the discussions: poor fit with policy priorities, lack of guidance, insufficient funding, or excessive red tape. Rather than over-regulating local action, the EU should set the conditions for it to flourish by setting ambitious targets, ensuring long-term funding certainty, and keeping a stable regulatory framework, while acknowledging and addressing the power asymmetries that often prevent meaningful participation. An example from a social housing renovation project in the Netherlands demonstrated the value of listening to residents' concerns, which resulted in increased enthusiasm and support for energy-efficiency measures. The discussion concluded by endorsing benefit-sharing as essential, and reminding that a just transition matters more, in the end, than a purely competitive one.

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Shared Green Societies

A European Forum connecting
practice, policy and research

Across Europe, the demand for a green transition that is inclusive, just and has the backing of the people is increasingly urgent. Communities, authorities, civil society and SSH (Social Sciences and Humanities) researchers are innovating every day, yet too often work in isolation.

Shared Green Societies is a new European forum designed to bridge this gap – connecting evidence, practice, and policy, and bringing together those leading on the ground with those shaping ideas and strategies.

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