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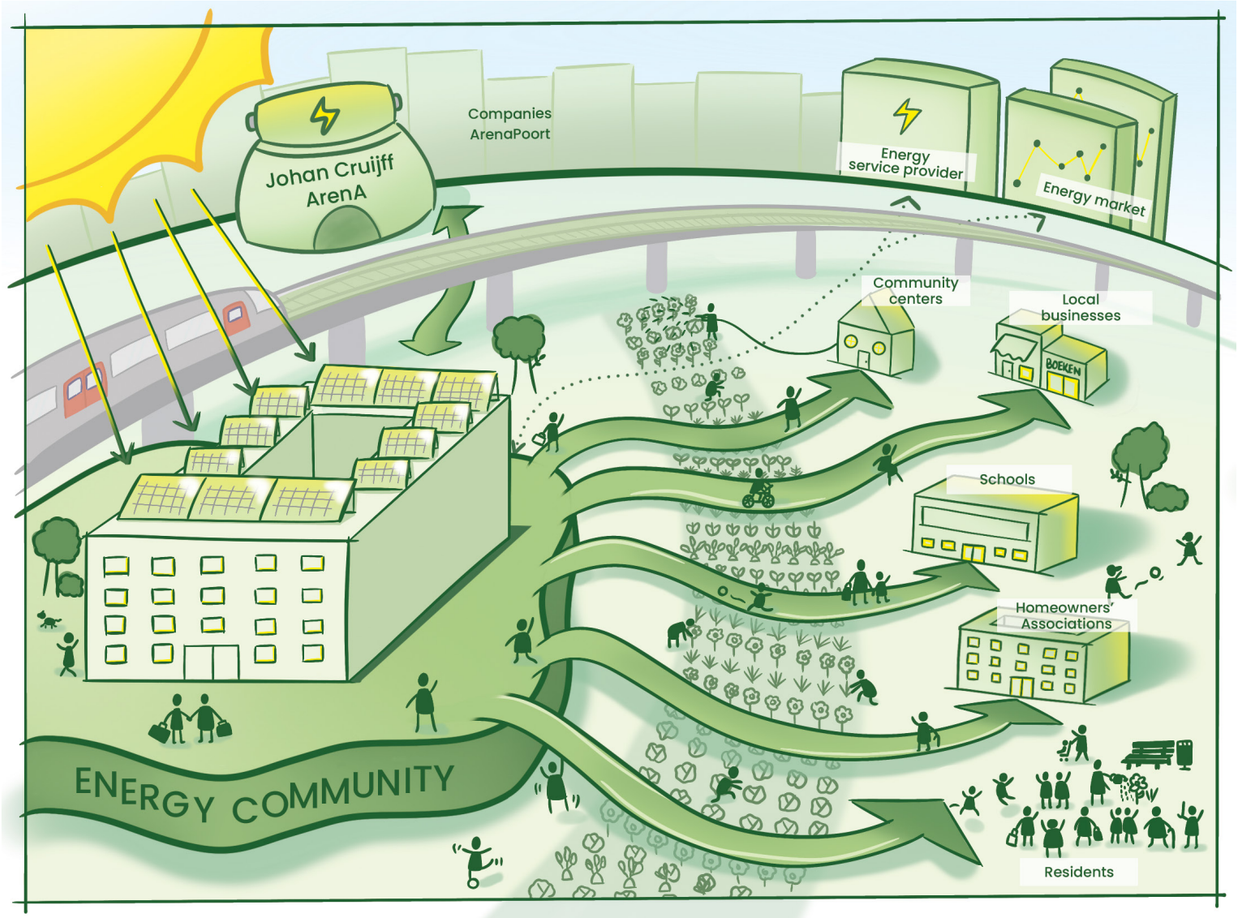
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This brochure provides a set of recommendations for how to organize energy transition projects in a more inclusive way. These recommendations are meant for anyone working in the local energy transition who wants to build stronger collaborations between residents, municipalities, researchers and other professionals. The recommendations address a variety of challenges and are based on lessons from four years of field research in Amsterdam Southeast.

The research was conducted as part of the Local Inclusive Future Energy (LIFE) project. The LIFE project took place between 2021 and 2025 and was a collaboration between universities, the municipality of Amsterdam, companies and local stakeholders in Amsterdam Southeast. The figure on the right shows a vision for a local energy community in the Venserpolder neighbourhood, which the LIFE project worked towards. The photos below give an impression of the various co-creation activities that were part of this project, and which resulted in this brochure.





Recommendations for an inclusive local energy transition: Responding to challenges of participation, power, and reciprocity

First edition

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This booklet was created based on the insights gained from design anthropological research as part of the Local Inclusive Future Energy (LIFE) City Platform project, which was funded by the Missiegedreven Onderzoek, Ontwikkeling en Innovatie (MOOI) subsidy program from the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO). The RVO is part of the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs.

Recommendations for an inclusive local energy transition

Responding to challenges of participation, power, and reciprocity

Gijs van Leeuwen

Abhigyan Singh



If you want to see more of the results of this project, scan this QR code!

Local Inclusive Future Energy

TU Delft | Industrial Design Engineering

1. Inclusive participation

- Embrace uncertainty – do not be attached to predetermined outcomes. Stay open to new connections, unexpected results, and surprising insights.
- Do not rush the process - meaningful participation requires patience. The energy transition is a marathon; do not expect to solve everything in a couple of years!
- Find a balance between encouraging residents to participate proactively and unburdening them to provide a lower barrier to entry. Some want to be closely involved and take responsibility, while others prefer to support without obligations.
- Plan well ahead to secure continuity before the project ends. Without a clear follow-up plan, progress and community engagement can fade away.
- Don't tunnel-vision on finding immediate solutions, as quick-fixes may not last long and have unpredictable side effects.
- Energy transition may seem boring, but participation is important for your future. Just like salad is less tasty than a burger, but better for your health!

2. Local collaboration and trust

- Collaborate with trusted local partners. They know where to start and what to be mindful of.
- Ensure that the trusted local partners are involved as early as possible so that they can shape the project's goals and directions right from the start.
- Include local residents in the research team. This ensures a more equal partnership and deeper community engagement, and you can cross-check your findings with them.
- Take time to build relationships with local participants. Trust grows slowly but makes meaningful collaboration possible.

3. Inviting atmosphere

- Use games, playful activities, and tools like Lego to spark enthusiasm, encourage creative thinking, and make the future energy system tangible.
- Everyone loves ice cream! Use food and local events to create a welcoming atmosphere and attract diverse groups, such as children and the elderly, to make complex topics more accessible.
- Energy transition is boring for some people. Designers and artists can help to make it exciting and meaningful.

4. Power and control

- Put extra effort into making space for the voices of marginalized and underrepresented social groups.
- Participation involves shared ownership between residents and external organizations. Make sure roles, responsibilities and decision-making power are clearly defined.
- Disagreements and arguments are part of collaboration. Engage with these openly instead of forcing consensus. They often lead to deeper understanding and stronger outcomes.
- Acknowledge that power dynamics are always part of collaboration and participation. Be aware of them and strive for a fair balance.
- If power asymmetries cannot be fully balanced, explore how they can be leveraged for more constructive outcomes.
- Systemic problems tend to overpower local human needs. Make space for "the small" because it is just as important!
- Resist the need to over-structure and over-formalize everything, as this produces new mechanisms of control.

5. Relations and reciprocity

- Reciprocity between stakeholders—especially residents and larger institutions—is essential for the energy transition. Actively highlighting each other's diverse contributions and mutual dependence can help build stronger collaboration.
- Energy transition projects can include unfair exchanges between stakeholders—take collaborative efforts to co-create more equitable partnerships.
- Include sufficient budget to compensate residents for their time, effort, and expertise. Go beyond symbolic gestures like gift cards or volunteer reimbursements.
- Ensure that local organizations receive adequate financial support, just like larger institutions.
- If you are an expert, help people to understand your subject. In return, be open to learning from them – residents are experts in their local environment.
- Put efforts to mediate and translate between systemic problems and the lifeworlds of people.
- Promote sharing energy within your neighbourhood, not just trading it on the energy market. Community-focused sharing builds solidarity, whereas trading profits individuals.

6. Balancing social and technical

- A successful energy transition requires that we create stronger relational and social infrastructure. It makes collaboration easier and neighbourhoods and societies more resilient.
- Long-term agendas and infrastructural changes should not overlook short-term needs and urgencies in people's lives today.
- New energy innovations should be embedded in existing local practices and networks rather than intruding from the top-down.
- Reducing the energy bill is important, but not at the cost of social needs.
- Energy transition is not just about creating markets - it should strengthen local community economies.
- Researchers can help people navigate the potential risks of becoming active participants in the energy transition. Similarly, they can help to identify opportunities.

7. Engaging in Dialogue

- Marking an area as "developmental neighbourhood" can be an alienating starting frame - be careful when using such language.
- Beware of jargon: phrases like "grid congestion", "energy transition" and "flexibility" are meaningless to many people. Try to use everyday language and techniques such as story-telling.
- Don't merely provide information: help make energy transition more understandable and support the learning process of participants.
- Continually and repeatedly synthesize and communicate your findings. Keep your stakeholders up to date so that they remain involved.
- Hire local content creators for your communication campaigns, as they know what resonates with local communities.

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