

COMETS 1° National Workshops
COLLECTIVE ACTION INITIATIVES IN THE ENERGY TRANSITION
THE NETHERLANDS
Tuesday 16 june, 2020

The COMETS workshop in Netherlands took place on 16 June 2020. 20 atook part to the activities

Attendants: Brenda Harsveld (GREK), Tineke van der Schoor (Hanze Hogeschool), Anne Marieke Schwencke (AS-ISearch), Lea Diestelmeijer (RUG), Irin Bouwman (GREK/Provincie Groningen), Gerald Kristen (KiSS Solutions), Patrick Hoogenbosch (Spijkerenergie), Ronald van Giessen (Grieneko), Anne-Marie Poorthuis (Energiecoöperatie Wijdemeren), John Kwaks (Energiefabriek), Henny van der Windt (RUG), Franco Ruzzamenti (RUG), Esther van der Waal (RUG) and Chiara Ghisalberti (UNITO).

(we expected 2 more)

Attendants recognize hurdles and opportunities in Comets presentations (Dutch version).

Main discussion topics:

- a. Do we need cooperative model? In Arnhem case they use existing structures, such as municipality and foundation, while another initiative is organized as a home owner association. Sometimes there is a tension between working from an intergrative perspective as a community organization with a wide focus and working on sectorally focused themes with sectorally focused organisations. The focus of these other organisations is perceived to be too narrow in instances.
- b. What tasks should be outsourced, project development, investments, administration, management, knowledge development, maintenance? Some initiatives want to outsource as much as possible. Others doubt, it depends on quality of partner and – financial or other – interests – of partners. Does the partner have a service-minded attitude or looks out for own interests only? It is hard for the initiatives to assess this because of the knowledge required for co-creation of e.g. a district heating network. A tension exists between outsourcing and remaining in control of the project.
- c. Smart partners can be municipalities, DSOs, utility companies. They generally take time to take CAIs along during the process and explain.
- d. Is cooperative movement ready to win the energy battle; in case of wind, sun, and also heat, commercial parties may win. The market to gain a rooftop for solar or a ground position for wind is very complex and competitive.
- e. What are main legal issues: different ministries have different perspectives. Experiments with energy law are useful, but ministry of finances is against because it fears loss of income while more renewables may lead to more income. – CAI's should convince ministry on that. The Electricity law and Heat law are being reformed into a new Energy law and that may be a point to exert influence to lower the barriers. A problem now is that ownership of technologies should be individual to use some RE energy schemes, so this clashes with supply via a cooperative. A

solution that has been used by a participant is mandeligheid, a fairly unknown shared ownership structure. This structure makes that the batteries, inverters etc. Are all partly owned by members of the owners association and supply from the installation to the member, or from installation to battery to member are not taxed with energy tax. This avoids the double taxation of storage. However, this construction seems to be “gedoogd” rather than approved by the tax service.

- f. In the short term a new Heat law is crucial for cooperatives. When this heat market changes cooperatives need to be ready and have a competitive business model otherwise the cards will be folded for a long period and they will miss out. This is seen as an urgent problem.
- g. Profitability and good financial management are important prerequisites for collective enterprise, and this should not be forgotten. So developing good business models is the basis for cooperative enterprise, and a special point of attention are inclusive business models that don't require any or just small investment of members. The next step is to run a good admin. Complying with the rules of authorities as the consumer and markets authority and the authority for financial markets is rather onerous and complex even for small projects. Suggested here is to make use of collaboration and regional structures to set up back offices (has already happened in some areas) and use the support of consultants that are specialising in supporting the local energy initiatives in this respect.
- h. Operationalization of European directives 50% citizens ownership and energy community) is crucial. Energy communities are defined as organisations with members to guarantee a democratic approach. In NL this is embedded in the so called omgevingsparagraaf (local environment section) of the Climate Agreement. Local energy organisations are asked to participate in the regional energy strategies and help to think about ways to realise this 50%, and give shape to a regional energy vision together with other stakeholders from the region. However, the RES procedure is demotivating with too much and unclear communication.
- i. Professionalization is required but also risky, how to balance volunteers-close to citizens, and professionalization? Paying for certain roles may go at the expense of appreciation that others who remain volunteers experience. However, professionalization is key to surpass muddling through. Some think that the current path of knowledge development and knowledge exchange may hinder fast moving forward. They feel attracting professionals (as volunteers or as consultants or as staff) who already have the expertise works better than educating and sharing knowledge, because projects increase in complexity. The feeling is workshops and working groups will not provide sufficient solutions anymore.
- j. Cooperatives can be a vehicle for local energy development if they can make the switch from plans to action. If they have done this once, they are often moving on to other projects and are also attracting people with a more action oriented / citizen engagement skill set. A challenge is to get projects from discussing spreadsheets to interconnecting people and managing a team.
- k. Some CAI's experiment with communities of practices around certain themes, such as storage, sharing, energy services, law. In this COP's representatives of CAI's came together to explore, discuss and design new options. They also have websites, and sometimes work together with other parties.
- l. In some provinces CAI's are organized in overarching cooperatives, which coach new initiatives.

- m. Hieropgewekt and Energy Samen are strong overarching organization, both with learning networks, around heat biogas etc.
- n. To gain visibility and strengthen cooperative/ local energy as a brand the Mienskip energie certification label (meaning community energy in Frysian) was developed and is used in the region. Mienskip producers and users get signs they can attach somewhere outside to signal local energy.
- o. Grid capacity is already a bottle neck in certain provinces such as Friesland. Collective projects can often not be connected.
- p. All attendants think that the comets platform has no additional value, because there are already good functioning platforms, because questions are country specific, and because of the language, English. They strongly advice to communicate via existing channels, e.g. Hier Opgeweekt national platform and the REScoop international platform.