

Fostering citizen acceptability and empowerment in energy-related social innovations: an analysis of key social dynamics

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Social Innovation approach

Social innovation is “a change in social relations, involving new ways of doing, organizing, framing and/or knowing”

Transformative Social Innovation will “challenge, alter or replace dominant institutions” (Haxeltine et al., 2016).

Transformative change is conceptualized as “an emergent outcome of co-evolutionary interactions between changing paradigms and mental models, political institutions, physical structures and innovative developments on the ground” (Avelino, Dumitru et al, 2019).



Social Innovation approach

Adopting a **place-oriented and context-dependent perspective** of social innovations in the energy domain.

Social innovations are **locally-embedded phenomena** whose transformative significance and impact are contingent upon broader changes in the social-material context.

“Processes of social innovation are dynamic, porous and connected to the long-term trajectories of social innovation initiatives. They occur through a diversity of social processes from which a set of common patterns can be inferred as common features” (Pel et al, 2016)



Fostering citizen acceptability

Citizen acceptability refers to people's general evaluation of an energy policy or a specific energy project (Perlaviciute et al, 2018).

Our objective: identify processes and dynamics predictably leading to social acceptability, indifference or active opposition.



Empowerment approach

Empowerment is conceptualized as the process through which human actors gain the **capacity and willingness to mobilise resources to achieve their goals:**

“People are empowered to persist in their efforts towards institutional change, to the extent that basic needs for **relatedness, autonomy, and competence** are satisfied, while at the same time experiencing an increased **sense of impact, meaning, and resilience**” (Avelino et al., 2020)



A needs-based model of empowerment

(based on Avelino, Dumitru et al., 2019)

Dimension of Empowerment	Individual Sense	Local mechanisms for deepening	Translocal mechanisms of expanding
Relatedness	<i>I am connected to others</i>	Deepening local community relations	Relating to others in other places
Autonomy	<i>I can determine what I do in line with my values</i>	‘We can do things differently in line with our values’.	Together we can do things differently. Creating larger supportive contexts for autonomous action – e.g. by pooling resources together and creating alternative markets; facilitating autonomy by engaging with systemic obstacles.
Competence	<i>I am good at what I do</i>	Developing & sharing local skills & expertise	Sharing and learning from each other and thus developing skills and expertise
Impact	<i>I can make a difference</i>	Tangible impact in local context.	Increased access to resources and legitimacy, based on the evidence that there is not only local but also global impact at a wider-scale.
Meaning	<i>I believe in what I do</i>	Local sense-making and collective identity.	Translocal confirmation of certain shared values through e.g. shared narratives of change.
Resilience	<i>I can adapt & recover</i>	‘Our community can survive crises/ pressures’.	Sharing & learning from each other’s failures & challenges, how to overcome.



Method

- Embedded case design
- Different from a holistic case design, such research design also observes sub-units (both the initiative, as well as organization members)
- As indicated by Yin (2003:50-52), the embedded case design helps the researcher to deal flexibly with the fact that the appropriate level of analysis may not be evident at the start of the research



Case study design



Cluster of energy efficiency against fuel poverty
Municipality of Timisoara (Romania)



Cluster of urban mobility with superblocks
Vitoria-Gasteiz & Barcelona (Spain)

Urban Mobility with Superblocks

Vitoria-Gasteiz & Barcelona (Spain)

Superblocks foster the introduction of low-carbon mobility practices through the reorganization of urban space in neighbourhoods. Car-free areas are redesigned to foster social interaction and pedestrian use.



Social innovation is both the process through which spaces are redesigned and the changes that support sustainable mobility, new forms of recreation, and community development through possibilities for joint social activities.

Fighting energy poverty through energy efficiency

Timisoara (Romania)

Timișoara has developed an action plan to reduce its fossil energy use and decrease carbon intensity.

As energy costs are a challenge for a significant proportion of the city's inhabitants, it is necessary also to address fuel poverty.



This SI is characterized by public authorities working in coordination with supply companies and civil society organisations fighting fuel poverty with a tailored and inclusive approach to implement energy efficiency measures for households and buildings.

Method

Sample

Cluster	Case study	Promoters and pioneers	Stakeholders	Supporters	Beneficiaries	Experts	Total of participants
Superblocks	Vitoria-Gasteiz	4	2	2	4	0	12
	Barcelona	2	3	3	3	1	12
Energy efficiency	Timisoara	1	0	3	0	2	6

Through **30 in-depth semi-structured interviews**, we studied the **factors and dynamics influencing the social acceptability** of these SIs as well as the **causes of resistance or contestation**.

Results

Key factors and social dynamics influencing social acceptability in superblocks

Codes	Groundeness	
	VG	BCN
Community engagement in decision-making processes	64	68
Dissemination, communication and education strategies	17	39
Making change easy	29	24
Pilot projects	27	16
Celebrating new identities	0	5
Negotiation/mediation to gain consensus	1	12
Targeted communication strategies	9	6



Results

Key factors and social dynamics influencing social acceptability in energy efficiency projects fighting fuel poverty

Codes	Groundeness
Developing meaningful interpersonal relationships	14
Inclusive, participatory approach involving communities	16
Ensuring institutional support	8
Dissemination, communication and education strategies	7
Targeted communication	10
Community empowerment	6
An empathetic approach	9



Social dynamics influencing citizen empowerment

Categories	Codes	Groundeness		
		Vitoria-Gasteiz	Barcelona	Timisoara
Changes in quality of relations	Between those involved in the SI	18	7	12
	Between authorities and citizens	11	3	6
	Lack of support	3	12	-
Developing competence & mastery	Developing skills, abilities and knowledge	21	10	27
	Gaining influence	16	27	-
Gaining financial and technical resources		6	4	-
Gaining sense of impact (perceived benefits and outcomes)		13	34	25
Gaining sense of meaning	Personal satisfaction	34	15	4
	Receiving acknowledgement	20	4	-
	Lack of support	9	-	-
Developing resilience	Gaining resilience capacity	18	8	9
	Futher steps/actions needed	10	-	8



Conclusions

- Top-down policies are perceived as impositions or measures alienated by the citizens, while **participatory approaches** are successful strategies for gaining citizen acceptability
- Enabling **contexts for meaningful participation** and allocate sufficient time and resources to engage key actors and citizens in co-designing efforts **foster sense of meaning and impact**, which increases endorsement and commitment to the project
- Allowing time for co-production and the resolution of differences in interests and vision are useful strategies for anticipating social resistance or contestation
- Social innovations build upon citizen's engagement to innovative solutions. Processes of SI are dynamic and occur through different stages and different levels of involvement are required in each stage
- Empowered communities develop a **sense of “collective responsibility”** over the project which might lead to new instances of local entrepreneurship



Thank you!

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