

Abstract Energy & Society

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Title: Practices and dynamics of community-led heating projects

Community energy can be conceptualized as a social movement, which aims to develop a sustainable, democratic, and localist energy system. Increasingly, community energy initiatives aim to develop citizen-led heating projects. District heating projects are characterized by costly investments, a substantial overhaul of local infrastructure, large installations for heat production, and require specialized technical knowledge.

Based on Social Movement Theory, we developed a theoretical framework consisting of three main networks: internal, external, and material.

In the Netherlands, we studied four cases of citizen-led heating projects. Our primary research question is what a citizen-led DH-project constitutes. We focus on four themes: the internal organization of the CH-project; its outreach to local citizens; the role of technical knowledge and technology choices; the changing role of municipalities in the local energy transition.

We situate our findings against a broader European background. We conclude that a democratic structure, transparency of decision making, and a high level of neighborhood participation are key success factors. However, in some cases the choice for a low-cost solution led to concessions to the sustainability of the proposed solutions.