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Inventory made of measures that REScoops implement targeting energy savings among their members

By Thomas Hoppe and Frans Coenen (University of Twente)

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In the REScoop Plus project researchers of the University of Twente have made an inventory of measures and actions REScoops implement targeting their members to (directly and indirectly) lower their energy consumption.

Measures that are used can be classified in a threefold way. First, measures are implemented to inform and/or incentivize members to lower their energy consumption (antecedent strategies); for example awareness raising campaigns, workshops and tailor made advice. Second, measures are used that inform the members about their own energy consumption, and explain why and how energy consumption is at the level that is revealed. It mostly about giving REScoop members feedback about their energy consumption (consequence strategies). Examples are smart metres, billing, and (online) coaching. Third, there are measures that do not target the REScoop members directly, but can have an impact in lowering REScoop members' energy consumption in the long run. These measures aim to increase the professional capacity, network or business model of the REScoop itself, for example a REScoop starting a wind energy project in collaboration with local government, regional government and NGOs, while using a subsidy and covenant to support project operations.

The analysis conducted by the University of Twente revealed that many antecedent strategies are used by REScoops. Many of the information tools used by REScoops were found, were in fact rather similar to what other energy suppliers, governments and NGOs use. This raises the question whether REScoops are in a better position as compared to the other organizations mentioned when informing and incentivizing (their) energy consumers. A competitive edge could be that REScoops might be seen as a trustworthy information source, and are closer to the citizens in terms of geographical and human interaction. They have the specific knowledge capacity and critical mass to help their members with energy saving measures but can also easier address the energy awareness of their members. Becoming REScoop member can even be seen as a measure in itself, as the REScoop memberships includes partaking in REScoops' shares (hence ownership) and being exposed to the social dynamics and social norms of the REScoop and its member base. For example, setting an energy savings goal jointly with other REScoop members, and by doing so committing oneself to pursue this (collective) goal.

The analysis conducted by the University of Twente also revealed that less consequence strategy measures were used than antecedent strategy measures. Moreover, the consequence strategies that were used varied a lot, and included both direct and indirect feedback tools. Often feedback tools were found to be well supported by online platforms and intelligent technology (i.e., smart metering). However, only a few REScoops were actually using state of the art feedback technology. The majority was on the verge of starting to adopt and use feedback tools.

REScoops were also found to use a lot of measures that indirectly target energy consumers: e.g., in contracts, covenants, partnerships, alliances or innovation project collaboration, involving many public and private actors. Measures used by REScoops were found to target multiple goals, e.g., awareness raising, energy savings, investment in RES projects, training householders in using energy equipment, professionalization, attracting new REScoop members, and increasing householder's experience with RE or energy efficient technology.

The study revealed that measures are only seldom implemented individually. REScoops usually implement them in 'packages'; i.e. a set or combination of different measures, typically including one or more antecedent strategy measures and a consequence strategy. For example a package including: leaflets to raise awareness, an energy awareness education program in which householders can participate, a smart metre that is installed in-home, and software (and perhaps a neighbourhood group of people) to reflect on individual energy consumption (and share experiences among the participants in the neighbourhood group).

The study also revealed that little systematic monitoring and evaluation actions were organized thus far. The ones that were conducted, however, show promising signs: i.e. the Isernia project in Italy revealed a 7% reduction of energy reduction, participants in the Dr. Watt training program offered by French REScoop federation Enercoop realized up to 40% electricity reduction in the use of home appliances, and (active) members of Dutch REScoop LochemEnergie lowered primary energy consumption by 20% over a five year span after the REScoop started operations in 2010.

In the next part of the project the University of Twente will assess the actual impact, and effects of actual measures among the REScoops that participate in the REScoop PLUS project. This includes a set of quasi-experiments and surveys among REScoop members. Data will be collected among hundreds of REScoop members. One of the key aims is to reveal information on whether REScoops have certain advantages over conventional energy suppliers in the energy services they offer, and attaining significant lower energy consumption levels.

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