



Responsive Organising for Low Emission Societies

ROLES Newsletter 3 – December 2022

Introduction

How time has flown! We have completed two years and with that our intensive fieldwork phases, to now enter the third and final phase of our project, where we analyse case insights and synthesise across cases.

A major new output co-sponsored by ROLES with wider collaboration has just been published by Palgrave Macmillan, a book entitled 'Digitisation and low-carbon energy transitions', available open access here: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-16708-9> - read, reflect and recommend it far and wide!

Since we began in 2020, stakeholder engagement has remained absolutely critical to ROLES's success.

Our project is all about exploring how European city-regions could use digitalisation as a way to accelerate decarbonisation in their energy and transport sectors. But we are particularly interested in how city-regions might do this *inclusively*, in a way that creates social benefits for their citizens – like reducing fuel and transport poverty, for example.

But we can't do this alone. Inclusive pathways to decarbonisation have to be co-designed with stakeholders who understand their city-region's energy and transport systems, and whom these system exclude.

That's why for the past few months we have been holding workshops in four cities across Europe focussed on these issues, in order to better understand what an inclusive future energy or transport system for that region might look like, and how to get there. These workshops presented an opportunity to share our findings from fieldwork with diverse stakeholders and reflect jointly on inclusive twin transition pathways.

Here's how the workshops went.

ROLES in Trento: Two narratives about energy

On Wednesday 19th October, the ROLES Italian Workshop went ahead in the hall of the Centre for the International Cooperation in Trento. The workshop attracted over 20 attendees from various departments of the Municipality of Trento, different offices of the Autonomous Province of Trentino, local energy businesses and utilities, the University of Trento, local research institutes, and civil society organisations.



What the workshop was about

The workshop focused primarily on how digitalisation will affect the deep decarbonisation process in Trento and the governance, social inclusion, and justice and equity issues digitalisation raises. More precisely, it focussed on how digitalisation might affect the roles that consumers and energy communities play in Trento's local energy system.

The workshop consisted of three phases. The first phase was about putting the workshop in context for participants. Eurac Researchers introduced the ROLES project and the results of the interviews conducted during the first year of the project. A representative of the Province of Trento (APRIE – Provincial Water Resources and Energy Agency) also provided insights into how local energy communities were shaped.

Energy as Commodity vs Energy as Common Good

During the second phase, the participants were divided into four working tables, and asked to reflect on two distinct ways of thinking about energy. First, *energy as a commodity*. On this narrative, people are considered primarily as prosumers and consumers. The primary goals of energy policy are described in terms of efficiency gains and increases in energy production from renewable sources.

They were also asked to consider *energy as a common good*. According to this alternative narrative, stakeholders are seen as active citizens rather than reactive consumers, and energy systems are understood to be governed by interrelated communities of citizens and other stakeholders.



A Space for Discussion

This second session allowed participants to then discuss deep, wide-ranging questions like:

- What role does digitalisation play for energy communities at the European, national, and local levels?
- What can energy communities do for deep decarbonisation?

- How can energy communities be just and equal?

The discussions the working tables produced displayed some fascinating insights into the current regulatory, technical-legal and organisational barriers to a just, inclusive configuration of energy communities – and the synergies between different local actors that would be needed to overcome those barriers

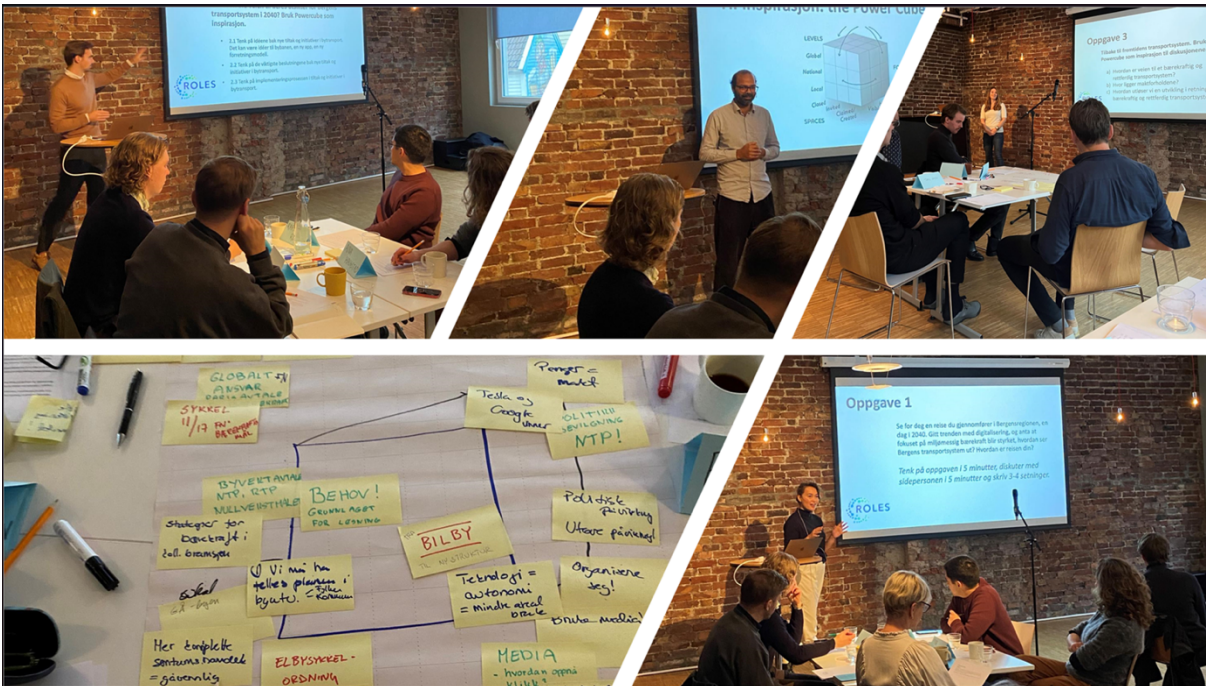
The next steps

At the end of the workshop, the participants enjoyed an aperitif prepared by Cooperativa Samuele. This local social inclusion cooperative organises catering for various events and is particularly attentive to sustainability (short chains, fair trade, organic market) and social inclusion issues, such as of people with disabilities.

The results of the workshop will be shared with the participants in order to facilitate further discussion on the decarbonisation process in the coming years.



ROLES in Bergen and Stavanger: the Future of Public Transport



The Norway ROLES team held two workshops; one in Bergen (at the Literature House) on 28 October and another in Stavanger (at the Scandic Royal Hotel) on 11 November 2022. Both workshops proved popular, with 17 participants in Bergen and 15 in Stavanger. They also both included a diverse range of stakeholders and interest groups, such as transport sector employees, local council members, city planners and civil society organisations.

Urban Transport and Power

The focus on these workshops was on the power dynamics of urban transport during twin transitions. The Norway ROLES team wanted to use these workshops to discuss, identify, and better understand power dynamics within urban transport transition initiatives. The organisers split registered participants into small groups in advance, based on affiliation and background specialties, to ensure a variety of experiences in each group, and, hopefully, richer discussions as a result.

Setting the stage

In both cases, the workshop opened with an inspiring talk by Siddharth Sareen about ROLES's work, digitalisation, just transitions generally, and what specific challenges need to be overcome for a just transition in the urban transport space.

Task 1: What will public transport look like in 2040?

After that, the workshops were divided into the three tasks.

The first task was to reflect on the future of public transport. Helene Tråsavik from the ROLES Norway team asked all the participants to consider how they thought public transportation systems might look in their city in 2040, first individually and then with a few sharing their reflections in plenary to warm everyone up.

Task 2: Introducing the Power Cube

The second task, led by Morten Ryen Loe, was to think about power dynamics in mobility transitions. Participants were invited to view mobility initiatives through the lens of [John Gavanta's Power Cube](#). The Power Cube is a conceptual framework for mapping power relations in a particular system, and making them explicit, as a first step towards changing those relations.

To help guide participants' thinking on this, the ROLES Norway team handed out large sheets of paper for the four groups to write down their ideas and thoughts on post-it notes. They also asked each group to pick a group leader who would present their ideas to the workshops as a whole.

This exercise worked well; it generated interesting and varied discussions on power dynamics, just as the ROLES Norway team hoped it would, and gave rise to useful insights.

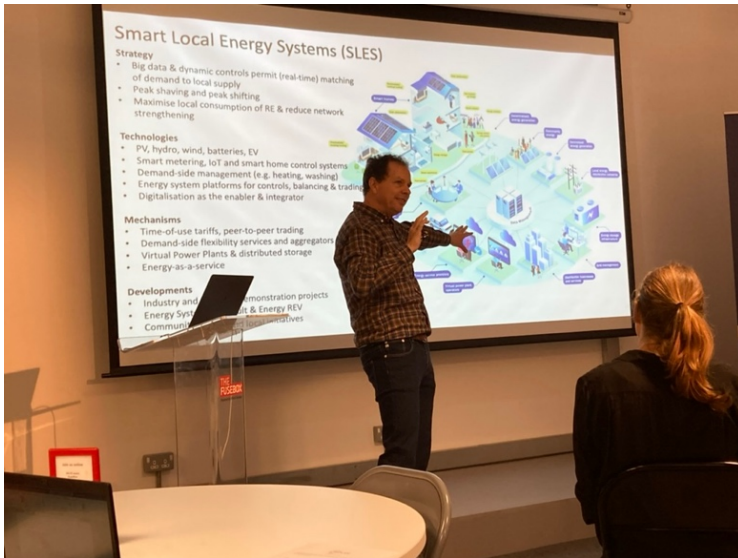
Task 3: Back to the Future

Finally, Katrina King asked participants to revisit the question they had begun with – what the future of public transport will look like – to see whether thinking about power dynamics had altered their thoughts.

Next steps

Now that these workshops are complete, the Norway ROLES team are focussing on a final round of analysis of both case studies, to feed into final publications specific to these transport transition cases. Increasingly, the thrust is on synthesising insights across case studies, to capture broader trends of urban twin transitions across sectors and contexts, and glean insights for inclusive pathways. The considerable set of outputs produced during 2021 and 2022 has also given rise to considerable interest among policymakers and local stakeholders, with whom the Norway ROLES team continues engagement on an ongoing basis.

ROLES in Brighton: Inclusive Smart Local Energy



On Tuesday 29 November, the UK ROLES team conducted their much-delayed stakeholder workshop.

This took place at Fusebox, in central Brighton, and was a fairly intimate gathering, with nine attendees beyond the researchers. Participants came primarily from different energy community groups and fuel poverty charities, but there were also people working for local councils, and some with commercial energy sector experience.

What the workshop was for

Collectively, these attendees had a keen understanding of the pain points, blockages, and inequalities in our present energy system. In this workshop, the ROLES team hoped to focus that expertise on the future, to encourage the development of a fairer, more inclusive, future energy system.

The workshop had three sessions. First, Adrian Smith introduced the idea the discussion would revolve around: Smart Local Energy Systems (SLES). Next, participants broke into groups to discuss who could potentially be excluded from such systems, and how to fix that. Finally, in the afternoon, Marie Claire Brisbois invited participants to use the Power Cube in thinking about relations of (political) power in the energy sector, and, more precisely, how those relations could be changed so that socially inclusive energy systems might flourish.

What is a Smart Local Energy System (SLES)?

A Smart Local Energy System (SLES) is a system that tries to maximise the consumption of renewable energies (like solar, wind or battery power) in a specific area. It tries to do this by using digitalisation, and the data it provides, to more precisely match local energy supply with local demand.

This might work through time-of-use tariffs, peer-to-peer energy trading, or demand-side flexibility services and aggregators.

Smart Local Energy Systems are attracting interest from people in industry and in government, because they can potentially contribute to the 3 D's: decarbonisation, decentralisation, and digitalisation. These are widely accepted as crucial for the UK is to transform its energy system in a way that allows it to achieve its Net Zero targets.

A rich topic of conversation

Once the scene was set, participants broke into groups to map the inclusions issues that these sorts of systems would need to watch out for.

Strikingly, conversations amongst the different groups branched off in very different directions.

In one group, conversation focussed the need to change regulations, democratise technology, and rethink the way energy security is commodified.

In another, the priorities were making communities the centre of the system, a one-stop-shop for retrofits, and a long-term, cross-party national energy policy for the UK.

And a third group picked out three very different features that might disempower people living in Smart Local Energy Systems: The nature of the UK's housing stock; the ownership of its distribution network operators (DNOs); and inadequate local heat networks.



Playing with the Power Cube

The sheer breadth of topics covered in the discussion session perhaps illustrated the central point of the the day's third session– that social exclusions in the energy sector can be multifaceted and wide ranging. This session centered on a game of **Power Cube twister**. This began with Marie Claire Brisbois introducing participants to the afore-mentioned [Power Cube](#), a conceptual framework for mapping power relations and making them explicit.

Participants were encouraged to think about mapping the power they or their organizations possessed in these terms – and about how that could be increased.

It took some participants a while to get to grips with the Power Cube. But the exercise seemed useful for many of them to open up discussions of power, and who found themselves moving restlessly from frame to frame on the grid, a visible demonstration of how relations of power aren't immutable and can be changed.

What's next for the Brighton Roles team

Now that the workshop is complete, the UK ROLES team is hard at work preparing a report to send to participants and other interested stakeholders, as well as starting to incorporate these results into research papers.

We also had our only in-person consortium meeting in October 2022, when ten of us used surface transport to meet in Groningen! Over a couple of convivial days, we exchanged insights, advanced project plans, and learned from relevant local projects thanks to Carina Wiekens and Marten van der Laan.



ROLES consortium members at our wonderful central venue, PuddingFabriek, for a meeting in Groningen.



See a full Twitter thread on the experience: <https://twitter.com/sidsareen/status/1576833181981892608>