

## **Effective and inclusive citizen engagement in the local heat transition. On our way to Positive Energy Districts (part of the NWA-ORC project EmPowerED)**

### **Aim**

Identifying the social-structural conditions under which *inclusive policy procedures* for the heating and cooling transition in NL succeed in integrating citizens at the neighborhood or community level.

### **Theoretical background**

While *inclusive policy procedures* appear promising instruments for accelerating the heating (and cooling) transition in the Netherlands, little is known about the factors that determine their success. Quite a bit is known about features of policy “co-creation” processes that promote citizen engagement in general, but this literature mainly focusses on either individual factors or aggregated community characteristics. The importance of such factors notwithstanding, sociological research into citizen engagement in the realm of climate mitigation suggests that *social structural* factors play a large part, too. Think of how citizens with various (socio-economic or demographic) characteristics are linked to each other and to important local associations in social networks, and of how individual characteristics are distributed across those networks. Against the background of state-of-the-art knowledge of engagement and citizen-science approaches (created by project partners at Leiden University and TNO, e.g. <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/citizensciencelab>), this project will develop and test theory about the effects of social influence and social networks on citizen engagement in policy and decision making, with an eye to generating knowledge that allows improving inclusive policy procedures by better attuning them to local network conditions.

### **Research design**

In the project you will analyze the potential social structural effects on local, inclusive decision-making processes in four ‘use cases’ in Groningen, Eindhoven, Nijmegen and Tilburg, alongside possibly other cases. Each use case harbors a number of communities, in (a selection of) which the PhD candidate will investigate social network structures to better understand citizen participation in inclusive policy procedures. While quantitative methods such as social network analysis and agent-based modeling will be important parts of the project, we encourage candidates from diverse methodological backgrounds to apply. An important deliverable of the PhD Project is a set of evidence-based recommendations for tailoring policy engagement approaches to the social structural features of local communities whose engagement is sought.

### **Literature**

Goedkoop, F., Dijkstra, J., & Flache, A. (2022). A social network perspective on involvement in community energy initiatives: The role of direct and extended social ties to initiators, *Energy Policy* 171, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2022.113260>.

Itten, A., Sherry-Brennan, F., Hoppe, T., Sundaram, A., & Devine-Wright, P. (2021). Co-creation as a social process for unlocking sustainable heat transitions in Europe, *Energy Research & Social Science* 74, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.101956>.

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