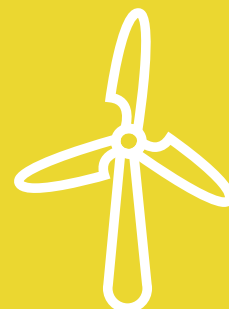
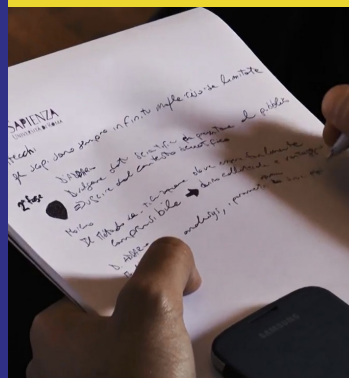
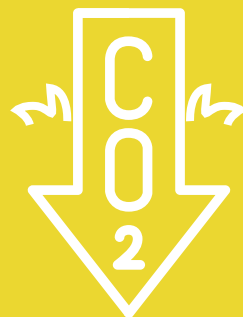


R&Dialogue

Building a
low-carbon
society
together



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Dutch Council member at German final event,
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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2012, a group of scientists, NGOs and consultants set out to improve the dialogue towards a low-carbon society in Europe.

A wide range of stakeholders were invited to participate, most notably from civil society, policy and the energy sector. We set up so-called “National Dialogue Councils” in the following ten countries: Czech Republic, Germany (North Rhine-Westphalia), Greece, France, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom (Scotland).

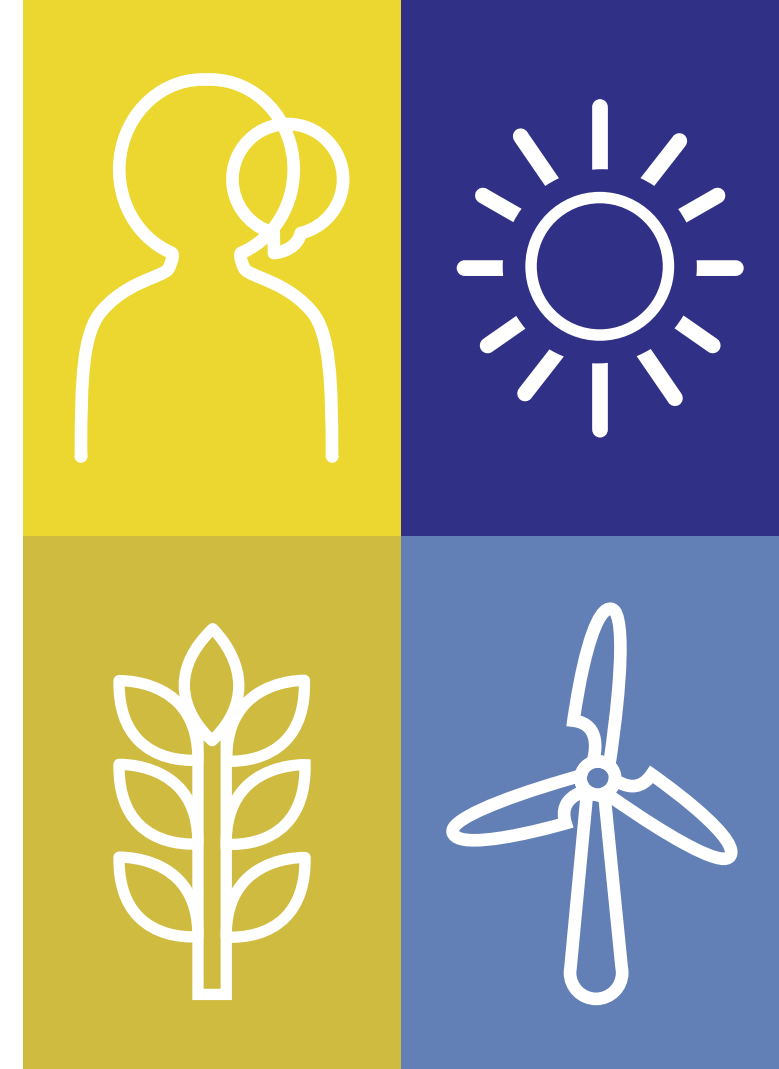
Participants met regularly in these Dialogue Councils to exchange their views and thoughts on a future with little to no CO₂-emissions. This resulted in an unprecedented open dialogue for the Dialogue Council members and in a shared vision on a low-carbon society and action plan to achieve it.

Parallel to these national activities, efforts were undertaken to integrate findings at a European level. Also, a team of social scientists endeavoured to support the process and investigate emotional aspects and social values underpinning the dialogue.

The document currently in your hands is a quick insight in the experience and results of the R&Dialogue project, proudly presented to you by all people involved. The aim of this document is to provide inspiration, tools and experiences in dialogue. With this, any dialogue initiator or participant does not have to enter dialogue unprepared. Much more information is on www.rndialogue.eu.



Putting the dialogue moving in Italy



EVERYONE IS A
PART OF THE
SOLUTION

SUMMARIES OF TEN NATIONAL VISIONS AND ACTION PLANS

Czech Republic ●

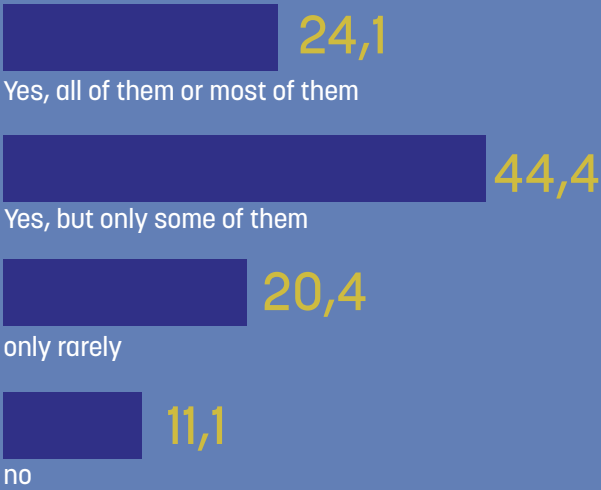
The diverse set of members that form the Czech Dialogue Council agreed that achieving a low-carbon society is necessary and requires efforts on all levels: environmental, social, economic, political and technological. All sectors will need to change: industry, construction, agriculture, services and households. Only in dialogue with all stakeholders, including the public, we can face this challenge. Market based tools, such as the EU Emissions Trading Scheme and administrative tools in the context of strategic planning can play a big role. Also international cooperation is key. R&D, with continued support from public funding, needs to deliver both cost reduction of existing low-carbon technologies and new breakthrough options. An open, inclusive and factual dialogue could reduce ideological barriers and open up new possibilities, mutual learning and a common vision. Participation of all stakeholders, including social groups, increases trust and effectiveness of the transition.

Czech Republic: How to achieve a low-carbon future? Czech R&D Dialogue team asks through the online questionnaire

To enlarge the circle of people participating in the Czech national low-carbon dialogue and to allow stakeholders to express their views anonymously, the Czech R&D Dialogue team decided to launch an online questionnaire.

Drawing attention to the unresolved issues of the transition to a low-carbon society, the questionnaire introduced questions formulated by the National Low-Carbon Dialogue Council in the Czech Discussion Paper. More than 100 responses were collected, reflecting a great diversity of opinions of the Czech stakeholders and providing a valuable input in the process of shaping the national low-carbon vision.

Should low-carbon technologies be supported and financially subsidized?



Germany ● (North Rhine-Westphalia - NRW)

The NRW Dialogue Council concluded that participation and dialogue are essential to realise the climate mitigation targets. The German energy transition has already shown that social change is the main driver and obstacle for transition. Everyone needs to be part of the transition process. Dialogue and participation are tools to get people engaged and develop the competences necessary to combat climate change. The NRW Dialogue Council developed a vision of a low-carbon future in 2044. Although obstacles will emerge we will meet the key points of a sustainable energy system: security of supply, financial viability and environmental compatibility. The energy transition will become a holistic process that contributes to solutions for other problems (poverty and unemployment). Technological progress is essential for a low-carbon society but the change in consumption and values will be an even greater driver towards a low-carbon future.

Greece

As a small country, Greece's contribution to Europe's CO₂-emissions is low. But its geographical location makes it especially vulnerable to the consequences of climate change. The Greece Dialogue Council sees the crucial importance of societal dialogue in the energy transition. This dialogue should include the role of both fossil fuels (mainly lignite) and renewable energy sources. Individuals and companies should make more sustainable choices, supported by educational efforts. At a municipal and regional level, participative sustainable projects need to be developed in line with a National Energy Plan. At the national level, this plan is to realise an energy transition that secures Greece's economic development. An update of regulations and the tax system is needed to facilitate these actions. Research can lead the way to smart cities, clean coal and energy efficiency. With this in mind, Greece can embark on the path towards a sustainable society with support and active participation of all parties involved.

Social acceptance and public participation are essential for a low-carbon society

We have invited high ranked stakeholders in North Rhine-Westphalia to discuss the future challenges of a low-carbon energy system. The experts have all long been part of the energy transition in Germany and know from their daily engagement in this change process, what the drivers and obstacles of transitions are. The need for better involvement of the public, which is not only passive energy consumer but also active agents in the transition process, was identified as one major issue and intensively discussed.



EVERYONE NEEDS
TO BE PART OF
THE TRANSITION
PROCESS

Open and relaxed exchanges in Paris

The « oil and dependence » French sub-group met three times at a German tea house in Paris for open discussions about the interaction between citizens and oil energy. Benefiting from the very varied backgrounds and generations of the participants, the group built several posters of Post-it notes materializing their perceptions, ideas, concerns, personal feelings, experience... about how oil energy interacts with our daily lives. And it found that the great variety of possible interactions between citizens and energy reflects a complex questioning about core individual and social values.

France ●

The French team organised its National Dialogue Council around four themes: wind power, social acceptance and difficulties; oil and dependence; energy transition and European construction; territorial organisation of the energy transition. The common vision on these themes form the French vision of realising the energy transition. Special importance in this vision was given to a smaller role for fossil fuel and a larger role for energy efficiency. More distributed power production at local level, e.g. renewable energy projects, needs to be implemented in cooperation with local communities. The European Union should firmly unite on energy and climate issues. Industry and the public would benefit from a stronger link with scientists. Investing in the energy transition requires stability in energy policies. Social dialogue is a way of co-creating the energy transition, which allows for a more participatory and democratic society.

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Beach dialogue on offshore wind project in Noordwijk, the Netherlands

Italian R&Dialogue teams wins over the citizens of Caprarola

At request of the Italy dialogue council, a dialogue was set up with the citizens of Caprarola on local and global energy issues. Examples of such issues are: energy issues and quality of life, possible uses of local biomass, and difficulty for citizens to get the right information on these kinds of matters.

The dialogue concluded in a 2-day Energy Festival in Caprarola with enthusiastic citizens and a grateful Mayor.

Italy ●

Inspired by the well known slogan “think global, act local”, the Italian Council started interaction with citizens to find out together how to improve the energy system. Big themes such as the need to make energy available to everyone and consideration of costs/benefits in relation to life quality have been central in the dialogue. At the same time the Council talked about making the effort to understand how to translate it in everyday practice and which role each one has to play. The experience has shown that energy dialogue can progress through joint work, when we listen and give attention to the complex social mechanisms involved in communication and decision making on energy issues. Potential for transition and ideas for innovation at local level have started to take form when time for exchange and collective thinking has been made available. This led to the growing awareness that to foster transition of the energy system we probably need to “think local, act global”: implementing well thought and agreed solutions at local level will have a positive impact on global actions against climate change.

TECHNOLOGY SHOULD SERVE SOCIETY AND NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND

Offshore wind dialogue in the Dutch Dialogue Council

Dutch Dialogue Council expressed the wish to link to real local dialogues on the energy transition. This lead to a visit to the city of Noordwijk on the west coast, which is close to a planned offshore wind park. In Noordwijk, fierce citizen resistance rose against the wind park. The Dialogue Council exchanged views with representatives of Noordwijk with the aim of learning lessons on dialogue. A key lesson is the importance of close and early involvement of citizens and other stakeholders in planning construction of low-carbon installations.

Norway ●

Norway has a unique position on energy, with both a huge capacity in hydropower and a status as the largest fossil fuel exporting country in Europe. A diverse group of stakeholders joined forces in the Norway Dialogue Council with a shared desire to work on a low-carbon society. This Council talked about the consumer’s role, knowledge and business, concrete political direction, education and skills, and participation. Their vision for a low-carbon Norway in 2050 sees a high share of renewables and highly improved energy efficiency, clean air, workspaces are green and we have high biodiversity. Through direct and participatory democracy, a stable policy is built that invites investments in a low-carbon society. The potential for developing and using renewable energy, such as sun and wind, is released. Consumption with a low ecological footprint is encouraged through labels and taxes. Transport and cities become smarter and greener. An ombudsman will ensure that the measures put in place match the climate targets Norway has set. This vision was presented to Norway’s Minister for Climate and Environment.

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● Netherlands

Big parts of the Netherlands are below sea level, which makes facing climate change as urgent as it is challenging. The task is huge. The Dutch Dialogue Council based its work on the targets set by the Dutch National Energy Agreement shortly before R&Dialogue started. The Dutch dialogue focused on how to reach these targets through an inclusive dialogue. A dialogue that was found to be missing or at least failing on a number of levels. The following building blocks for a successful dialogue were identified: figure out why the action is necessary, what the problem is and who is involved; clarify responsibilities at the start; map and analyse stakeholders and interests; appoint an independent process director; make clear agreements on the dialogue process; share knowledge and information; be sufficiently flexible in policy, projects, compensation and participation. Finally, take the necessary time in dialogue to build trust. This message was presented to the Dutch Parliament and the Dutch Social and Economic Council.



Presenting the Norway vision and action plan to the Minister

Norway

Norwegian Minister for Climate and Environment meets the Norway R&Dialogue team. The vision and action plan of the Norway Dialogue Council was presented in the summer of 2015 to the Minister for Climate and Environment Tine Sundtoft. The somewhat unusual collection of 18 very different actors in the Council, who together have identified a vision for how a low-emission Norway could be in about 35 years, piqued Sundtoft’s interest. “I like the approach of transition and management of change through dialogue. There has been too much focus on confrontation and experts with lots of different opinions. It creates confusion and makes it harder to create public support for a change” she said.

Can powerful messages pave the way towards awareness on a low-carbon society?

The Portuguese citizens as a whole are ready to intervene in questions that can affect negatively their everyday life. The issues related to the low-carbon transition are still perceived as distant, so a continuous and resilient effort in communicating is essential. Scientists and the NGOs have particular credibility that can be harnessed in this effort – although scientists are not always the best actors in communication! More and better information conveyed adequately seem essential ingredients for transitioning to a low-carbon future, and... can an image be better than a thousand words?



Open session about energy transition in Spain



R&Dialogue Spain took part in the 12th National Environment Congress (CONAMA)

Portugal ●

As a country with low fossil energy reserves and high renewable potential, Portugal sees wide support for renewable energy and energy efficiency. This makes sense both economically and ecologically. This in turn leads to a remarkable level of consensus on a vision of Portugal as a low-carbon society: “Our future energy system will be decentralised, technologically universal, sustainable, inexhaustible, versatile, robust and will bring countries together. We will all be catalysts of that change. We must find values that will be shared and transmitted from generation to generation.” An important aspect of the dialogue necessary to realise this vision is better communication between stakeholders such as business, research and communities. Recognising the role of scientists and NGOs as facilitators of a stronger dialogue process is possibly an important element for its success. Also better shared understanding of cost-benefit aspects of the energy system is needed, with successful examples made highly visible.

Spain ●

The Spanish Dialogue Council addressed common approaches and visions related to high dependency on external resources, overcapacity of the electricity system, complexity of the energy mix, unsustainability of the energy sector, environmental commitments and geographical situation of the country, among others. Although the dialogue within the National Dialogue Council has been organised according to different topics (wind, solar, CCS, etc.), the discussions have considered general concepts, technologies and resources available - as well as other cross-cutting issues. The Spanish Dialogue Council pointed out that Spain does not have a long-term energy strategy and stressed that solid commitments in Spain are required to build a low-carbon society. Furthermore, the Council highlighted the need to create new mechanisms and tools that will lead to a more informed and educated society on energy aspects. In this context, different proposals arised to enrich future paths to a real energy transition.

Spain: Future low-carbon society starts today

Firm commitments and long term strategy for a real low-carbon energy transition is being strongly requested in multiple forums. R&Dialogue Spanish Council with representatives from industry, civil society, research community, NGO´s and media has held a fruitful debate on the national energy framework during the dialogue process. Technological, economic, environmental, socio-political and educational aspects of energy have been proposed within the meetings, always with the common agreement that to build a low-carbon society, we must do it together in a truly participative process which would be enriched by exchange and mutual learning.



Making a vision works best if you have a great view (UK coast)



Finding common ground in UK R&Dialogue Scottish Water workshop



Group dialogue in the UK R&Dialogue Scottish Water workshop

UK R&Dialogue team makes a splash at Scottish Water

UK Dialogue Council included an advisor from Scottish Water (SW), who are responsible for providing water and wastewater services in Scotland. During the National Dialogue phase, the UK R&Dialogue team partnered up with this Council members to deliver two design thinking workshops to redesign the SW low-carbon strategy. Through the course of the workshops, five ‘visions’ for the future of carbon management within SW were identified, each supported by a range of suggested actions to meet these ambitions. A key lesson from the workshops was the need to extend participation in carbon management further, to include a greater number of the SW staff responsible for implementation and delivery of projects ‘on the ground’.

Getting a wide range of stakeholders in the same room, and giving them the space and time to think about carbon management was a great opportunity. The two workshops have given great momentum to efforts to develop a comprehensive carbon accounting system within the business

UK (Scotland) ●

A “low-carbon Scotland” is a priority for The Scottish Government, and a large amount of stakeholder dialogue had already taken place before R&Dialogue started. Consequently, so-called “dialogue fatigue” hampered the formation of a Scottish Dialogue Council. This challenged the Scottish R&Dialogue team to take an innovative approach that would allow climate change experts from industry and research to collaborate with non-experts on low-carbon issues. Design thinking was applied to realise this collaboration, focusing on creative and constructive problem solving. Uniquely within in the R&Dialogue project, 6 randomly selected citizens joined the UK Dialogue Council. Through the metaphor of a “Low-Carbon Scotland Hotel” a vision was created which takes account of renewable energy sources, buildings, food, the circular economy, apprenticeships and even gardening. The principles were then applied in three ‘real life’ contexts: ‘Foodwise’, carbon management at Scottish Water and low-carbon labs at the University of Edinburgh.

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Foodwise: a low-carbon innovation made in the UK dialogue

The UK Dialogue Council was comprised of a mixture of professional low-carbon stakeholders and randomly-selected citizens with no prior energy expertise. In order to effectively integrate the different voices in the Dialogue Council, and cope with different levels of knowledge, the UK team used ‘Design Thinking’, an approach which emphasises user-centred innovation and collaborative problem solving. One of the innovations to emerge from this process was ‘Foodwise’, an online forum in which to share personal experience and information on local food options, and to help users make low-carbon and sustainable food choices. The concept has since been developed into a fully-functioning online platform, visited by more and more people every day.

THEMES IN R&DIALOGUE

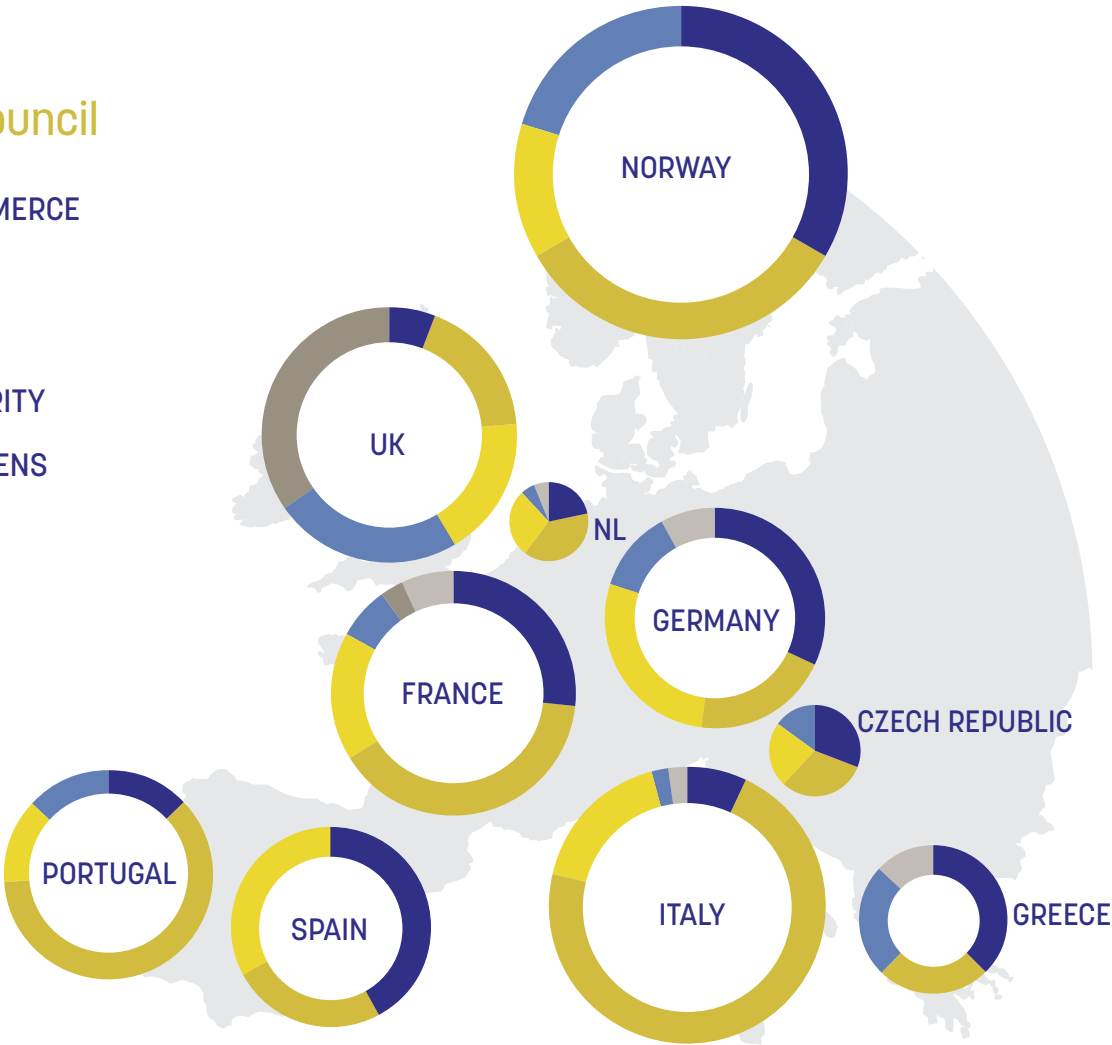
How do we set up dialogue and build trust?

In R&Dialogue we have brought together a broad set of stakeholders and offered them an open space for a low-carbon dialogue. Four basic principles were proposed to inspire the work of the ten country teams:

- 1. Joint definition of the objectives of the dialogue activities
- 2. Dialogic support based on a listen and feedback process
- 3. Establishment of functional rules for the dialogue group agreed by participants
- 4. Use of interactive settings to get to know each other and build mutual understanding

We strived to establish channels of communication between a diversity of stakeholders with contrasting perspectives and priorities regarding a low-carbon energy transition, to forge partnerships and facilitate cooperation.

Participants in the Dialogue Council



The National Dialogue Councils hosted on average ten to 15 participants and met around five to ten times for half or full day meetings over the course of 2014 and 2015. A wide range of dialogue formats was applied to achieve interactive Council meetings: Roundtable Discussions, Design Thinking, Focusing, Nonviolent Communication, World Café, Future Workshop, Dynamic Facilitation, Dragon Dreaming, subgroup sessions, etc. Particular attention was also given to other dialogue characteristics as venue, facilitation, rules, relationships and maintaining communication between meetings. Trust is essential in dialogue, and was a focus for R&Dialogue by prioritising honesty and clarity and by striving for an open and inclusive atmosphere. This has lead to active and respectful participation in the Dialogue Council meetings.

Different scales of dialogue

A dialogue about a low-carbon society is meant to go beyond existing insufficient consultation processes. If done well, dialogue promotes mutual understanding, stimulates practical action and has a measurable influence on policy-making by encouraging convergence (agreement, cooperation) at all scales: local, regional, national and European. Local and regional dialogue can lead to quick implementation of low-carbon solutions in a positive atmosphere: increased local acceptance, creative local activities and more economic added-value that stays in the region. Local authorities have a crucial role to play. We have seen this in R&Dialogue, but also in initiatives as Energy Cities and the Covenant of Mayors.

The R&Dialogue Dialogue Councils had a national focus, except for the dialogues in Germany (North-Rhine Westphalia) and UK (Scotland). Most concluded that dialogues at the national level are important for e.g. developing national objectives/targets, legislation and fit-for-purpose subsidy schemes. Development of corresponding national energy and climate roadmaps have much to gain from involving civil society and local perspectives through dialogue. Unfortunately, time pressure on decision making can provoke an exclusive dialogue which seems efficient on the short term, but can lead to frustration and delays in the long run.

The climate and energy system are international, which makes Europe a suitable level for agreements on targets and to implement a system as the EU Emissions Trading Scheme. It is therefore arguably the suitable level for an inclusive dialogue on innovation and low-carbon solutions that is flexible enough to take local and regional perspectives into account. R&Dialogue supports the European Energy Dialogue of the European Economic and Social Committee which aims to establish this dialogue.

Relationship of citizens with technology

Citizens have a wide variety of roles in the energy transition: voters, energy consumers, media and information consumers, employees and residents. As such, their opinion of technologies in the energy transition varies as well, along with the corresponding level of acceptance of these technologies. The citizen as an energy consumer is recognisable and has been a useful hook to start a dialogue, for example by talking about energy bills and consumer habits. Dialogue with citizens and civil society on the energy transition can take different forms, including a focus on specific technologies and on the energy transition in general. A positive engagement on a specific low-carbon technology can pave the way for a longer, more open and more generic dialogue. This can also give us more insight in other conditions that enable support for low-carbon technologies and in identifying obstacles such as lack of knowledge or trust.



BRING SCIENCE CLOSER TO CIVIL SOCIETY

The National Dialogue Councils in R&Dialogue conclude that the energy transition is a long-term, societal project, which cannot be accomplished successfully without involvement and approval of citizens. It is therefore well worth the investment.

Science and civil society

Successful climate change governance, of which dialogue is a key part, depends on improving collaboration between science and society. This collaboration is often hampered by differences in knowledge level and style of communication. Nevertheless, some see a key role for science as dialogue initiator. Other roles for scientists are to develop models and investigate feasibility, costs and impacts of the energy transition. Scientists in their nature produce a wide variety of outcomes with sometimes conflicting conclusions. This can cause confusion, mistrust in scientific findings and lack of action at societal level. Solutions for that could be to create open spaces for continual exchange (e.g. using Design Thinking) or even “clearing centres” for knowledge. Also, civil society could be consulted at the start of research project to integrate their perspective in research. Civil society representatives such as local NGOs and citizens groups can be considered valuable experts in the local context.: they know the people and the local setting best.

Energy transition economics and dialogue

National Dialogue Councils often talked about economic aspects of the energy transition: consumer prices, affordable energy, economic interests, resources, import, export, decentralisation, incentives and investments. Since we all get an energy bill, energy prices are a good place to start a dialogue with citizens on the energy transitions. Besides citizen interests, vested interests of the energy industry need to be taken into account by setting up an inclusive dialogue: include all relevant stakeholders. This allows for an energy transistion that also pays attention to competitiveness and jobs.

Decentralised energy can turn energy consumers into energy project participants or even “prosumers”, which sends the strong message that people can take the energy transition into their own hands – at least to some extent. This may lead to acceptance of low-carbon solutions. Other relevant economic aspects of dialogue are incentives to spark sustainable consumption and investments in the necessary innovations.

Aspects for further dialogue

In the R&Dialogue project we have been able to address a wide range of topics in dialogue. However, many questions remain unanswered. To fully reflect the dialogue in this document, these open issues are noted here as inspiration to follow-up dialogues. It proved hard to find agreement on the role of transitional technologies and energy sources such as natural and shale gas and CO₂ capture and storage. The role of conventional and non-conventional fossil fuels in the energy transition is crucial to talk about, but difficult to agree on. The best way to support and subsidise low-carbon technologies was another unresolved matter.

Dialogue as a concept has been a topic in itself too: is dialogue a means towards an end, an end in itself or both? Information that feeds the dialogue posed many Dialogue Council members with the dilemma of how to provide information that is complete, easily accessible and objective. Some participants found it hard to believe this is possible at all. Another open issue is the proper participation of society in a dialogue when the discussed topics do not (yet) directly concern participants. In such cases when dialogue topics do not directly affect participants we see a quick drop in attention. Finally, one stakeholder group will be notoriously underrepresented in dialogue if not properly addressed: how should we take future generations into account?

Keep talking: the future of dialogue

With dialogue now established as a potential key enabler of the energy transition, we offer a range of ways to continue the dialogue. Overall, the following stakeholders were identified that are best suited to carry on the dialogue:

- Policy makers and governments in general
- National Dialogue Councils, of which some have expressed an interest in remaining active as dialogue group and think tank
- R&Dialogue member organisations, who have invested much time and effort in successfully carrying out the project and have all expressed an interest in further developing the dialogue

The dialogue continues at the European level through the European Energy Dialouge established by the European Economic and Social Committee, which is embedded in the Energy Union. E-TRACK of the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre is another energy dialogue hotspot in Europe. Various dialogues at national and local level will build on the R&Dialogue experience, for example by National R&Dialogue Councils that continue working as a think tank. Participants in R&Dialogue have found the unique dialogue experience worthwhile and rewarding. It is worth the effort to simply be in the same room with people your rarely talk to and discuss strategy, daily work and common challenges in achieving a low-carbon society. Once the dialogue starts going and different perspectives come together, participants find understanding and common ground which often seems impossible to find in other ways.

EU VISION AND ACTION PLAN

In Europe we have set ourselves ambitious emission reduction targets, most notably an 80%-95% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The R&Dialogue consortium believes that these targets can only be reached if citizens not only share the overall ambition, but also agree with and contribute to the possible solutions. The R&Dialogue thesis consequently is: low-carbon solutions will be successful when the affected people are involved in the design of these solutions.

What do we learn from experiences in R&Dialogue? One way or another, most energy experts, civil society representatives, scientists and others that participated in the dialogue, see a low-carbon Europe in 2050 as both necessary and achievable. This requires not only an energy transition, but a transition in many other aspects of life: transport, social systems, governance, family life and consumption, since these are all connected.

Based on the visions of the ten R&Dialogue countries and talks with European stakeholders, we can construct a vision for Europe in which we see varying energy mix from country to country, with energy primarily supplied by renewables and other low-carbon technologies. A lot of energy is generated locally and on a small scale, with an active role for citizens. In some circumstances, energy companies should cooperate with local residents, also as possible to be shareholders in new developments. Increased trust through dialogue allows for an integrated European energy system and best practice sharing. National and European governments coordinate inclusive policy processes, possibly with climate Ombudsmen keeping track of progress.

Several more specific vision elements have been raised in some of the national visions and action plans in R&Dialogue. Circular economy principles should be applied to all sectors. Through carbon footprint labelling, carbon taxation schemes and education, consumers can be invited to choose low-carbon products, experiences and travels. Collective transport and bicycles should become the cheapest and quickest ways to get around town. Where possible, vehicles are low-carbon, running on electricity or fuel cells.

The dialogue necessary to achieve this vision should be based on the following principles:

- Long-term personal commitment of participants;
- Involvement of all stakeholders
- Listening and empathy
- Appreciation of what everyone can bring to the dialogue
- Respect of knowledge and competence of everyone
- Protected dialogue spaces, transparency, flexibility
- Agreement of objectives by dialogue participants

Untraditional engagement methods such as Nonviolent Communication, Focusing, Design Thinking and Dragon Dreaming can be used to involve different stakeholders in co-creating joint solutions. Dialogue spaces are set up to create a culture of dialogue rather than confrontation, which may lead to improved decision making.

R&Dialogue advises to take the following actions;

- Establish more long term multi-stakeholder dialogue spaces
- Activate more research funds for experimenting with innovative dialogue formats
- Establish fast-track EU research funds for urgent research and innovation needs
- Allocate a higher proportion of research and innovation funds for the roll-out of already existing low-carbon technologies and solutions
- Ensure a more prominent role for the low-carbon technology platforms of the European Commission
- Involve civil society and industry more thoroughly in design of programmes

SOCIAL PROCESS LESSONS LEARNT

Managing the social processes related to energy dialogue can be a tough challenge. The first lesson we have learnt in R&Dialogue is that each stakeholder in the field of energy has a different idea of what should be done. It is also true that many vested interests are involved. Because of this it is quite difficult for all players to imagine a non-competitive and collaborative exchange process with an open outcome. Existing positions tend to pre-determine the possible results, thus eventually stifling dialogue. Also the lobbying approach and the common polarised debate style seems to condition the mind towards a kind of interaction which has little room for uncertainty. Instead uncertainty is a necessary ingredient for finding a new kind of relationship and a dialogic approach to problem solving.

The second lesson thus is that we need to be aware of a low tolerance for uncertainty. This uncertainty is an emotional component that cannot and should not be eliminated, and therefore calls for more frequent and intensive dialogue experiences. Becoming familiar with dialogue exchange would have a positive impact, both at a conscious and an unconscious level, on the possibility of sharing the burden of uncertainty. It can provide the psychological support needed to better face the complex challenges associated with overhauling the energy system.

This brings us to the third lesson learnt. Many specific aspects must be considered to organise a multi-stakeholder dialogue, starting from every day processes, like how a meeting is organised or a document produced. The R&Dialogue experience has allowed us to detect some diffidence about how the different stakeholders look at each other's working ways (procedures, rhythms, habits, etc.), for instance the way consultants versus researchers work, leading to strong doubts about the resulting products. From science to journalism, from environmental activism to policy processes, from industry to citizens, the gap existing between different approaches often makes it difficult to understand each other and develop a functional collaboration.



Group dialogue in one of the Italian dialogue events



Finding and reporting common views in group sessions in Italy

Therefore, a lot of attention should be given to harmonise the collaboration process, giving due relevance to the different approaches, making them more explicit for the outsiders and enabling participants to make joint choices that will create a “common” space and procedures, something everyone can work well with. At the moment this may be the biggest challenge for anyone who might wish to learn how to conduct a social multi-stakeholder dialogue. Creating an appropriate dialogue infrastructure is, in fact, essential for overcoming any particular point of view. It can also create a space where all points of view have a right of existing and a real chance of participating and contributing to energy innovation processes. With R&Dialogue this was at least partially achieved.

Thanks to this, we can conclude what the fourth lesson learnt conveys to us: by activating a proper process it is possible to establish new kinds of relationships which cross the borders of the sectorial compartments that presently characterise the energy stakeholders' landscape. Finding such channels of human interconnection is a very concrete priority and probably essential for the realisation of the analogous interconnection required for a unified European electricity grid and Energy Union.

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