

Case Study S3C

Smart Grid: Rendement voor Iedereen



S3C related keywords:

- Community building
- Project communication
- New smart grid service concepts

“Bottom-up approach beneficial for active engagement of end-users”

Project Summary

The Dutch project Smart Grid: Rendement voor Iedereen (English translation: ‘Benefits for All’) consists of two pilots of 100 households in two different Dutch cities, each with their own approach. In Utrecht the pilot takes a top-down approach and communication between participants and the management is bilateral. In the Amersfoort pilot, a bottom-up approach aims to establish a process of co-creation with a community of end users. In Amersfoort, the participating households are empowered and activated so they will feel capable and willing to be part of the project. Therefore, the community based approach in the Amersfoort pilot is the key focus in this case study.

Each participating household receives a smart meter for electricity and gas consumption, five smart plugs, an app that gives insight in their energy use and, if applicable, a device that measures the electricity production from the solar panels. The goal of the project is not to develop new technology, but instead to create new services around smart grids that have a viable business case, such that it becomes attractive for households to purchase smart equipment.

What sets this project apart from other Smart Grid projects?

The bottom-up approach in Amersfoort is rather unique in the world of smart grids. A consultant specialized in community development was brought in to give shape and to support the community of end users. This community coach also functions as an intermediary between the community and the project management.

The community coach applies a dedicated methodology, which does not follow a standardized roadmap but is tailored loosely to the project objectives and the target group. The community coach also participates as an end user in the project, which contributes to a shared feeling of ‘we’re in this together’.



After a successful recruitment, a contest was held among the 100 households that joined the pilot to choose a name for the community, resulting in the name ‘AmersVolt’. Next, a group of project ambassadors was formed, consisting of 12 participants to representing AmersVolt towards the

project management. They offered their help voluntarily, because they are motivated to contribute to the design and implementation of the pilot project. Each ambassador brings in professional expertise and know-how from his or her job or education, reinforcing the project's knowledge base.

These ambassadors got engaged in legal issues (redesigning the contract for participants), provided input in the design of web portal and app which displays end-user feedback and a number of ambassadors have helped out with installation by troubleshooting system bugs and installation problems at fellow participant's houses. They also host their own project community website. Ambassador meetings currently take place once or twice a month.

What happened?

After the project start in 2013, the AmersVolt community got engaged with various activities regarding development and implementation of products and services the project. In addition, the community takes up several activities that fall outside the scope of the smart grid project and aim to support the neighbourhood as a whole. AmersVolt is working on a group buy initiative for led lighting and distributing information among residents about how to reduce standby power consumption and housing insulation. Clearly, the community is driven by 'sustainability' motives rather than just participation in the smart grid project.

For the project management, this implies that they need to provide room for end users to express their ideas and suggestions, and allow leeway for their input in the development of products and services. Open and transparent communication with end users has also shown to be an important driver for confidence and commitment.



One of the most important lessons learned from the 'Rendement voor iedereen' pilot in Amersfoort, is that bottom-up citizen involvement requires top support. Although the project is currently only half way, the social work approach has been successful so far. The volunteers that participate as project ambassadors are well able to bridge the gap between the formal, anonymous institutions and the life world of residents and households.

Further information / Contact

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References:

Rendement voor Iedereen Homepage (Dutch only): <http://www.smartgridrendement.nl/>