

Power to the People: a neighbourhood based social intervention

Abstract

The number of local energy initiatives in the Netherlands is rising. The so called 'Buurkrachtbuurten' are contributing to this growth. 'Buurkracht' is a non-profit organisation aiming to support neighbourhoods in their attempts to reduce energy consumption. Their goal is save as much energy as possible and, in the process, to contribute to social cohesion within local communities. An intervention to increase awareness of energy consumption and to increase social cohesion was tested in four villages in the northern part of the Netherlands (the province of Drenthe). The aim of this study was to help people to take their first step in the larger energy transition. Participants ($N=75$) measured their energy use with energy power meters and shared the results with their neighbours and with the researchers. Through "within-subject comparisons" (of different appliances within homes) and "between-subject comparisons" (of similar appliances within the neighbourhood), participants gained insight in their energy consumption. Furthermore, results showed that after this intervention ("Find the Energy Guzzler"), some participants acted according their insights, e.g. replaced some appliances. The evaluation of the intervention was very positive and participants would recommend this intervention to other people. Also, one of the experienced benefits of participation was that it increased contact with the neighbours. Other strengths and improvements are discussed as well in the paper.

Keywords: Buurkracht, social cohesion, neighbourhoods, energy consumption, awareness