

Application Form submitted by the initiatives to participate in the Transformative Cities People`s Choice Award

GENERAL INFORMATION	
Location:	Valladolid (Spain)
Title of the Transformative Initiative:	EnergÉtica Cooperative [word game in Spanish since “energética” means “energetic” in feminine gender, and “ética” means “ethics” and also “ethical”]
Name of organization:	Cooperativa EnergÉtica
Type of organization:	Consumer’s cooperative (currently >1550 members and continuously growing).
Website:	https://www.energetica.coop/
Category and Edition:	ENERGY. Transformative Cities Award 3er edition (2020).
STORYTELLING	
Summary	
<p>Consumer’s cooperative created by citizens for pushing towards bottom-up local sustainable energy sovereignty. Cross-cutting scope including renewable energy generation (local mini-hydro and PV self-consumption), efficiency and building retrofitting, R&D and targeting electricity retailing as well as active collaborations with other Spanish and European organizations with similar and/or synergic aims.</p>	
Context and problem definition	
<p>The city of Valladolid hosts around 300,000 inhabitants (400,000 metropolitan area), and it is the largest urban and industrial pole of the region of Castile-and-Leon (Central Spain). It is a region of agricultural tradition and with a lower level of industrialization, sparsely populated, remarkably aged and with a traditionally conservative socio-political profile.</p>	

Energética was born in the decade of the 2010s in Valladolid in a context with significant barriers such as the absence of a relevant cooperative movement, a scarce associative tradition and the perception that energy issues were far from social priorities. However, the 2007-08 economic crisis and the Spanish social organized response and empowering through e.g., the 15M brought to the public attention several social issues which to date had remained overlooked. The energy issue was put on the social agenda through the massive problem of energy poverty, the indignation after the disclosing of the strongly unfair and oligopolistic nature of the Spanish energy markets, and finally the inaction of the central government to engage into planning the energy transition (cf. [related article](#)):

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0301421518305937>

With conservative parties governing at all political layers (local/province/region/state), a group of citizens from Valladolid decided to organize in a bottom-up way to try to change the situation.

Design and Implementation

Energética emerged as a social initiative at a peak of social mobilization of citizens proposing an alternative (distributed, democratic and based on renewables) to the prevailing energy model (centralized, oligopolistic and based on non-renewables). In this context, the creation of a nonprofit cooperative seemed the most natural option. But making decisions collectively is not simple, let alone in a community in which there is no strong tradition of horizontal governance. That is why the first steps of Energética were slow, and the process of establishing the cooperative required over fourteen months (Dec2013-Feb2015) of intense meeting activity lead by a core group of 40-70 people. This strong participative and collective process set the grounds of a united social base with clear and shared means and overall objectives specified in the fifty-four articles of its social statutes:

Overall objectives:

- active contribution to the transition towards a sustainable energy system,
- empowering society with relation to energy,
- bridge the gap between urban and rural areas,
- actively participate in Social Economy.

Means:

- participation and democracy (1member=1vote),
- independence from financial institutions (all investments and expenses to be paid from own resources),
- Transversal collaboration with other organizations with similar aims (other cooperatives, NGOs, unions, municipalities, etc.).

As a result of the wish to remain independent from financial institutions, the initial steps of the cooperative were cautiously planned due to its financial fragility. Workers could only be hired in a progressive way. The imbalance between the amount of work to do and the income required a very large amount of voluntary work during the first years, which was achieved thanks to the strongly motivated social base, although at the cost of some fatigue. 5 years later the cooperative has 6 employees allowing the activist contribution to decrease substantially but the hybrid approach is still in place.

The specific objectives and work lines were subsequently set through another long participative process in which a detailed Business Plan was elaborated (2018):

Work lines:

- local renewable energy generation (notably solar PV self-generation),
- efficiency and building retrofit services,
- participation in R&D projects,
- electricity retailing.

One of the main challenges is how to maintain the “participatory tension” with the increasing professionalization of the organization, the routinisation of the tasks that cease to be novel and the increase in membership size. This is being faced through an internal reorganization (ordinary, extraordinary and informative assemblies -including online retransmission-; Governing Council; thematic working groups; local extension groups; training encounters; Regular online queries; etc.), as well as intensifying mailing correspondence (Newsletter), the organization of regular thematic workshops, etc.

Results achieved and Evaluation

After 5 years of functioning, the cooperative has reached the following results:

Energy:

- over 2,000 electricity retail contracts (30% in the city of Valladolid with 3,119 kWh of power retailed, representing 89% of households and 11% of industrial and service users of the total)
- 255 MWh/year renewable electricity production. Most comes from the *Valteína* mini-hydro power plant of 1MW (<60 km from Valladolid) of which 18.5% were bought to the cooperative *Som Energia* in a joint-process thanks to a crowdfunding in which 123 Energética members contributed with 150,000€ (30% of the total membership in 2016).



Visit of cooperative members to the Valteína mini-hydropower plant.

- Local employment: 6 hired workers at Valladolid's headquarters (+ generated indirect employment in all Castile-and-Leon).
- Investment: 18,000€ in the first year of productive activity, 100,000€ expected for 2020.
- Balance between income and expenditures: -6,000€ in 2017, but in the following year was already positive: +8,200€.
- Launching of the campaign "Comunidades solares" (<https://comunidadesolares.org/>) to promote solar PV self-consumption projects among members (36 in process in Valladolid and over 100 in the rest of the region). The launching of this project was co-financed by a Circular Economy call of Valladolid's municipality.



First PV self-consumption in Valladolid (2019)

Regional scope - broadening impact

Although the cooperative was born in Valladolid, it aims at being a useful tool also at regional level. As such, it offers its services to the whole Castile-and-Leon and similar measures of political impact and transversal influence have been performed throughout the whole region.

Agreements with 10 municipalities from the region for electricity retailing and jointly launching energy sovereignty projects.

The political impact and transversal influence is reported in the next section “Political Strategies”.

Evaluation

The aforementioned Business Plan [see attachment] describes the main work lines including a detailed financial assessment of expected expenses and profits for the next few years. The actual results are checked against this plan once annually in a public Assembly to assess, understand and find potential solutions to the negative deviations.

Political Strategies

The birth of EnergÉtica as a social initiative at a peak of economic crisis and social mobilization of citizens in Spain has shaped its political strategy lines based on promoting citizen participation and empowering, social economy (non-profit organization) and cooperation with any organization with similar or synergic aims. The cooperative has managed to incorporate the principles and values of a new energy model to the agenda of many local organizations of Valladolid (and some of Castile-and-Leon) from different sectors and institutions including the University of Valladolid, labor unions, political parties, NGOs, municipalities, etc. The collaboration with the CARTIF Technological Center (also located in Valladolid area) has much facilitated the participation in top h2020 research European projects.

Obstructive organizations were found at rather state-level, namely the conservative central government in power in 2011-2018 and the traditional oligopolistic energy companies which launched a campaign of discrediting renewables and removing all financial and regulatory incentives in order to protect their investments in fossil fuels during the crisis.

TIMELINE

Jan2014: First meeting

March2015: Official constitution in Valladolid of the cooperative after several assemblies.

April2015: Decision to cooperate closely with the cooperative *Som Energia* as main strategic partner.

Through 2015: The project jumps from Valladolid to other cities and villages of Castile-and-Leon.

June2015: Fiesta 1st Anniversary + 1st meeting of Spanish Renewable Cooperatives in Valladolid (first step towards the creation of an organization gathering all of them “Unión Renovables”).

Sept2015: Start retailing renewable electricity.

March2016: Successful crowdfunding of 150,000€ for the purchase of 18.5% of a mini-hydro power plant of 1 MW (<60 km from Valladolid)

Dec2016: 500 members.

Oct2017: 1st Encuentros Energéticos (participation and formation workshop)

March2018: Approval of the Business Plan

April2018: 1000 members.

Oct2018: Inauguration of the headquarters in Valladolid.

Oct2018: first European h2020 research project “Muse Grids”

Nov2018: 2nd Encuentros Energéticos

Jan2019: second European h2020 research project “Social RES”

Jul2019: Launch of the campaign “Comunidades solares” for PV self-consumption.

May2020: 2000 members.

Strategic lessons learned include: the high value of autonomy combined with inter-cooperation which has helped building a resilient organization, and the need of maintaining a large and motivated (and well-informed) social base.



Voting during an Assembly

Communication and Cultural Strategies

The main communication tool of the cooperative is the webpage: <https://www.energetica.coop/> which has been recently fully remodeled and includes static information about the organization and aims of the cooperative, dynamic content with regular posts about the main activities performed, and a “virtual office” where the members and customers can check their options and communicate with the staff.

A newsletter is sent monthly to the members, another newsletter is maintained just for sympathizers.

An additional website has been designed for the project of solar PV self-consumption “Comunidades Solares”: <https://comunidadessolares.org/> with the objective of presenting the related information in a clear and distinct way, and where it is possible to request free studies of viability for your roof.

The cooperative has an intense activity in social media:

- [Facebook](#) (almost 2,500 followers),
- [Twitter](#) (>1,800 followers),
- [Instagram](#) (almost 800 followers), and
- [Youtube](#) (almost 60 subscribers and over 2,500 video views).

Local actions to commemorate relevant days, e.g., action to distribute hundreds of seat protectors in the public bike system of Valladolid:



Interviews and reportages about the cooperative have been published in many local and national media:

- national Spanish TV: <https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20170208/cooperativas-electricas-cuando-fin-no-vender-kilovatios-hora-sino-impulsar-nuevo-modelo-energetico/1486567.shtml>
- Último Cero (grassroot local independent media): <http://ultimocero.com/noticias/2016/05/24/energetica-y-la-universidad-de-la-mano/>
- Diario de Valladolid (local newspaper): <https://diariodevalladolid.elmundo.es/articulo/provincia/energetica-recauda-dia-mitad-inversion/20160311101623182332.html>
- Radio Universidad USAL (University of Salamanca): <http://radio.usal.es/entrevistas/autoconsumo-energetico-como-salida-a-la-crisis/>
- Radio Valdivieso (rural district in the North-East of Castile-and-Leon): https://www.ivoox.com/audio_rf_50903609_1.html
- Planeta Verde TV: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IY46kkFeg0Y>

Also [Wikipedia article](#).

Sticker so the shops can publicly identify themselves as consuming 100% renewables:



Additionally, with the aim of enhancing the communication between the members of the cooperative, the social base and the technical staff, as well as between the cooperative and the rest of the society, 2 forums of learning and participation are organized by the cooperative annually:

- *Encuentros Energéticos*: workshop to promote internal training for members about hot topics in which the cooperative is at the moment involved.
- *Fiesta de los Pueblos Energéticos*: more festive workshop, organized each year in a different rural area, which aims at focusing on the specific case of the transition in rural areas.

2 series of educational videos have been produced (see our youtube channel):

- about self-consumption in the time of the COVID
- about energy efficiency at home.

Resources, Financing and Transformative Economy

EnergÉtica is a social economy enterprise, a citizen instrument that enters the energy market to try to permeate the values of equity, transparency and sustainability. Its members and customers add up their consumption force to use it as a lever for social and economic change. In the economic sphere, EnergÉtica intervenes in several directions.

First: it detracts some of the economic flows of our consumer activity from the traditional circuits of the energy market (currently in the hands of a few companies operating under an economic oligopoly regime with a high capacity to influence the administrative regulator): all the money that can be managed directly by local citizen cooperatives remains in place and does not feed large companies based on the remuneration of capital (each Spanish household spends on energy services approximately 1000€/year on average). Financial flows from peripheries to central nodes are hence avoided. This allows the generation of local employment (currently six direct jobs). In addition, the cooperative's activity induces indirect business opportunities (in the fields of consultancy or installations) for an ecosystem of professionals locally.

Second: mobilizing the local citizen potential for economic investment to allow the cooperative purchasing/build renewable power facilities. In this way, and by ensuring the safety and reliability of the investments that we make through the in-depth analysis of each case by a working group including members of the technical team and voluntaries, we manage to finance renewable generation plants without relying on capital or financial markets. Our most successful example is the crowdfunding campaign managed to collect the amount of 150,000€ for the *Valteína* mini-hydro power plant when the cooperative still had less than 500 members (no more large investments have been possible to date given the barriers introduced by the central Government to new RES facilities in the 2011-2018 period).

Two additional examples:

- EnergÉtica manages an economic fund for educative and social activities which is financed through a voluntary donation in the electricity bill (0,01€/kWh, 8,000€ collected in 2018).
- Transformative social, technical and economic aspects of the transition towards renewables-based distributed energy systems are being researched within the two h2020 projects in which EnergÉtica will implement several case studies.

Related legislations

EnergÉtica has pushed for public motions in 6 municipalities to promote the political support of the promotion of a fair and sustainable energy transition.

EnergÉtica has been pushing (with some success) in Valladolid and other Castile-and-Leon municipalities for the public procurement of 100% renewable energy.

The shift in the state legislation to allow for PV self-consumption in 2019 was very welcome (EnergÉtica was actively campaigning for this change from diverse platforms it belongs such as the Px1NME, CylSolar -solar cluster of the region of Castile-and-Leon) and has recently allowed to launch a specific work line focused on this (“Comunidades Solares” project).

Ecological Transitions

EnergÉtica is at the heart of the necessary ecological transformations given its active focus for renewables. The phase-out of fossil fuels will also reduce the extractivist pressure of Northern countries over the impoverish regions of the world which have been historically rich in these resources. Still, as any energy consumption implies impacts, EnergÉtica emphasizes the need to reduce overall energy consumption and improve energy efficiency as much as possible.

EnergÉtica has a strong social approach and understands energy as a right/commons rather than as a commodity, a basic resource for a dignified life and whose management must come out of the logic of the capital market and be put it at the service of people. As an example, the cooperative has designed and built an original system to provide electricity from batteries and solar PV able to be transported by bike, which is regularly lent to social organizations requesting it [see attachment]. This allows to replace diesel generators in many public events, with benefits for pollution, GHGs but also noise. This project was financed by a Circular Economy call of Valladolid’s municipality.



Sol-ê, EnergÉtica’s device to generate clean electricity in a portable way

Another example of the transversal nature of EnergÉtica: the first cooperative of shared electric mobility in Valladolid has been recently created (“eKiwi”) as an initiative stemming from members of EnergÉtica which wanted to actively deal with one of the most unsustainable sector in modern economies. Seeds are being planted.

Lessons learned

In our young experience, we have learned that 5 points are critical for the successful operation of our cooperative:

- **Strong social support base:** our case shows that one of the main preconditions to overturn the hostile regulatory and social context lies in the existence of an informed and confident social base with strong and continued motivation to selflessly support the project over time,
- **Flexibility, resilience and innovation** have proved to be vital to surviving in a hostile context given the social motivations going beyond the market logic of EnergÉtica.
- **Membership increase:** EnergÉtica emerged from a local initiative in Valladolid and its membership has increased greatly as well as spread to other areas of Castile-and-Leon. Growth increases financial capacity which facilitates the operation in the market, financing of new investments or hire staff. The latter point is critical, since the continued dependence on voluntary work erodes members’ capacities and potentially compromising the long-term feasibility of the project. On the other hand, growth can affect the democratic basis of RES co-operatives, since it tends to complicate communication. Hence, we are aware that the active management of the growth of our organization is crucial for its long-term prosperity.

- **Cooperation:** Cooperation is essential for operationalizing and spreading the model proposed by RES cooperatives allowing a broader public to be reached. Cooperation with other similar organizations allows changes to be promoted by bringing up a common agenda. It is also indispensable to highlight the collaboration with *Som Energia*, the largest Spanish RES cooperative and one of the flagships of the RES cooperative model at European level: without it, EnergÉtica would have never traveled so far in so little time.

- **Diversification:** EnergÉtica aimed at the beginning mainly at retailing renewable electricity, but it soon became clear that the transition towards a sustainable and just energy system required much more transversal changes.

Conclusion

We believe our story may contribute to inspire and motivate other people which want to be active part of the transition towards sustainable energy systems. We sincerely think that our case brings hope as it shows that, even if the regulatory and social contexts are far from being favorable, a strong and well-coordinated social local base has the capacity to overcome these barriers and build an organization aligned with the aims of the sustainable and fair energy transition. Of course, no magic receipts exist and each community will have to find out how to best address the ecological transition challenges at its specific context.

EXTRA INFO

Covid-19 outbreak impact

COVID-19 outbreak has strongly affected the normal functioning of the cooperative given that visits to customers are a regular activity of the workers. These visits allow to study the viability of installing self-consumption solar PV and/or efficiency and building retrofit. Hence, the work plan has had to be redesigned given more weight to tasks able to be done when working from home such as improving online communication (e.g., recording of original videos in humoristic tone for increasing social awareness about energy issues, recording of video-tutorials so those installing self-consumption PV can maintain their systems autonomously), performing reports with the available information online, etc.

The Governing Council has had all its meetings (every 2 weeks) in the period of confinement via videoconference, as well as the weekly meetings of the Technical Team. The II Meeting of Energy Peoples will be this year organized online (4th June), while the Ordinary General Assembly is also expected to be held online at the end of June.