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# D7.9 REPORT DESCRIBING THE ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED FOR THE KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNITY PLATFORM – FIRST VERSION

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## ABSTRACT

This deliverable presents an overview of the activities undertaken within the ECOEMPOWER Community Platform (EECP), also referred to as the knowledge platform. The document begins by introducing the Communities of Practice Playbook, which serves as the primary guiding framework for the platform's development. It further outlines the co-creation processes involved in formulating the EECP's vision, alongside knowledge-sharing initiatives stemming from the ECOEMPOWER project. The report provides a detailed description of the platform's organizational structure, comprising three core groups: support for one-stop shops (OSS), service development for energy communities, and community management and internal coordination. Additionally, the deliverable discusses the development of fact sheets and a toolbox for disseminating project results and facilitating knowledge exchange. Challenges encountered in tailoring the toolbox to specific functional requirements are addressed, as well as ongoing efforts to resolve these issues. The document concludes by reflecting on the results, challenges, and lessons learned, offering valuable insights for the design and implementation of community platforms in research environments.

## KEYWORD LIST

ECOEMPOWER Community Platform, Communities of Practice, renewable energy communities, One Stop Shops, co-creation, knowledge sharing, research communities, research consortium, research partners, multi-level governance, stakeholder engagement, enabling frameworks

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This deliverable describes the activities which have been carried out under the scope of the ECOEMPOWER Community Platform (EECP)<sup>1</sup>, also known as the knowledge platform. It begins with the introduction of the communities of practice playbook<sup>2</sup>, which has been used as the main guiding tool for our work. It follows on to describe the co-creation activities to develop the vision of the EECP, as well as other activities related to sharing specific knowledge emerging from the ECOEMPOWER project. Finally, results, challenges and lessons learned are described, as are the next steps and further developments of the platform.

As a first stage of community formation, the communities of practice playbook recommends developing the vision through co-creation. The reason for taking such approach is multifaceted. On one side, the playbook provides a structure for interaction with the outside world. This is relevant, given the role of research projects in proposing new avenues for socio-economic development. Potentially, research projects can become initiators of tomorrow's institutions. On the other hand, there is a need for socialisation in research projects. The mobility of research project participants (i.e. worker mobility) makes it difficult to ensure continuity of efforts, even within the short timeframe of the projects. Moreover, addressing the elaborate construction of research projects, from proposal to delivery, can be greatly eased through socialisation. This means that the knowledge community platforms enable for researchers to develop structured knowledge sharing approaches which facilitate the exchange of knowledge across work packages, leading to a more concise and coherent project delivery.

Through the communities of practice playbook, the purpose of the EECP, the challenges it addresses and the goals it aims to achieve were addressed. The outcome is presented and commented herein. This information was used to co-create the working structure of the EECP. The outcome was a simple, three group approach. The first group is focused on providing support for one stop shops (OSS). The second group is focused on developing services for energy communities. The third group has the responsibility of community management and communication, and it serves as a closed group for internal EECP coordination, including communication. Worth mentioning, the workload of the third group is one which shouldn't be underestimated, for it is responsible for carrying out the organisation of the socialisation processes involved.

With knowledge sharing as a first phase of activation, the efforts carried out relate to the development of fact sheets for project results, as well as a toolbox which hosts specific results of use to the community. Said fact sheets summarise the main achievements of each result (and/or specific deliverables), briefly describe the methodologies applied, present research insights and practical applications; while doing so in a quick and easy to read format. The EECP toolbox, which hosts results which are of use to the EECP's target groups, is tailored according to characteristics of each tool and the functionality these provide to the tool's users; challenge which is being actively addressed at the time of writing.

As community platforms are an emerging innovation in the research environment, we present our results together with challenges and lessons learned. These insights can be useful for other projects implementing community platforms, as well as for framework setters to gain insight into the design and value of the platforms. The latter point is also addressed in the aforementioned communities of practice playbook, which presents the platforms as a link between European Union knowledge centres and the research networks it supports.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ecoempower.eu/Community\\_Area](https://ecoempower.eu/Community_Area)

<sup>2</sup> The communities of practice playbook is a “comprehensive toolbox [that] helps you run and develop communities, networks and any other formal or informal structures that require collaboration and cooperation between various stakeholders who need to work together with a common purpose and vision”, and it has been published by the Publications Office of the European Union.

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## 1 Introduction

The ECOEMPOWER Community Platform (EECP) is a strategic initiative designed to facilitate knowledge exchange and foster collaboration among stakeholders in the energy and public policy sectors. As a key component of the ECOEMPOWER project, the platform serves as a repository for research insights, tools, and best practices, promoting the co-creation of solutions to pressing challenges in energy communities. Additionally, it aims at engaging stakeholders from all governmental levels. This deliverable outlines the processes and activities that have been conducted under the scope of the EECP, with a focus on the development of a structured approach to knowledge sharing, community engagement, and platform management.

The development of the EECP has been guided by the Communities of Practice Playbook [1], which provides a methodological framework for the formation of effective, collaborative networks. Central to the platform's success is the active participation of stakeholders in co-creating the platform's vision, structure, and goals. The initial phase of this process involved defining the platform's purpose, the challenges it seeks to address, and the outcomes it aims to achieve.

This document provides an overview of the platform's progress, including the development of the EECP's vision and organisational structure, as well as that of fact sheets and a toolbox designed to support knowledge sharing. It also reflects on the challenges encountered during the platform's implementation and offers lessons learned that may benefit future community platform initiatives in research and innovation. By sharing these insights, this deliverable contributes to the broader understanding of community platforms and their role in facilitating collaboration and knowledge transfer within the European research landscape.

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## 2 Description of the Knowledge and Community Platform

The knowledge and community platform (i.e. ECOEMPOWER Community Platform) should mirror the project consortium's approach to engage with the outside world. For it, we have initiated co-creation activities which allow for us to generate a basic common ground from which to explore said approach. The value of co-creation is two-fold: on one side, our partner's contributions help improve the results of said activities; and on the other, we achieve internal alignment and interest in participation (more or less, ownership in terms of platform design and self-determination in terms of the definition of roles and responsibilities). This does not come without difficulties. From the perspective of simultaneously multi-cultural and multi-specialisation interactions, understanding each other's work within a research project is a commonly experienced challenge. Moreover, the role of each EEC group is not easily determined. The recognition of these challenges is what begins clarifying the role of research communication: communicators need to sufficiently understand the subject matter and the project from a holistic perspective and interact with the consortium in a functional way, even regarding the subject matter, albeit in a superficial or abstract way.

Finding the right level of abstraction (i.e. away from the intricate levels of detail taking place in the project) to communicate project results includes the ability to identify the value of results to the environment they serve. This is hardly achieved without co-creative interaction. We aim at bringing the communication team's research project experience to the whole consortium (and partly to the outside world) through the EEC. Communication teams don't only attempt at asking the right questions, but often have the opportunity to organise specialised meetings to understand results quicker and faster. Tacit knowledge exchange has a strong effect on research and development not only among research leaders engaged in strategic discussions, but also on junior researchers who are becoming familiar with the European research environment and with the context of each project. For that reason, we believe that knowledge platforms can contribute to the European research ecosystem by becoming more harmonised, functional, prevalent and integrated in programs and projects.

Knowledge and community platforms also have multiple interactions with the outside world (as can be seen under section 2.3.2 Networks and Ecosystem). This can be understood both from the organisational perspective, as well as with external individuals (e.g. other researchers, employees and interested citizens). Even if this point comes secondary to the improvement of social interaction within a project through the "communications team experience", it is not any less of a protagonist in the development of knowledge and community platforms. These platforms, when achieving functionality, are to create a solid link between European leadership institutions (such as the JRC or Horizon Europe) and research consortia. Moreover, research consortia can team up with other organisations (including other research consortia) through such platforms by harmonised knowledge sharing methods and working strategies; as well as the identification of common goals.

Facilitating knowledge exchange between consortium members through eye-to-eye, but empathetic (i.e. tacit knowledge exchange) and social interactions is only the first step if viewed from the bottom-up perspective. Nevertheless, the communities of practice playbook emerges from the top-down as an EU (European Union) Joint Research Centre (JRC) publication which has already engaged with multiple bottom-up efforts which have experienced organising such platforms in the past. For that reason, it is considered as a trustworthy guide towards the organisation of our efforts related to the EEC in the ECOEMPOWER project.

### 2.1 Co-creation activities based on the Communities of Practice Playbook

As stated in the communities of practice playbook, this guide is "based on rigorous scientific research and vast empirical experience within the European Commission on communities of practice, [and it] consists of step-by

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step guidance, good practices and interactive visual boards allowing you to co-create a roadmap to develop, engage and empower your community at every stage of its journey” [1]. This playbook was implemented in the consortium through a workshop plus discussion format, as a guide to help organise the EECF development strategy. As much as it was perceived as a useful tool to guide our efforts, applying all of its elements into the research project community would be too much effort. For that reason, the consortium discussed its contents and decided on addressing a few selected elements within it. That being said, more elements found therein will be addressed as the project progresses, although not with the same level of rigour as the playbook promotes. The degree of co-creation can vary depending on subjects and circumstances, but this may be related to the proposed vision, target groups and ecosystem relationships to be based on the project framework.

## 2.2 Platform purpose and goals

The EECF’s purpose and goals are directly linked to the vision of the EECF and aim at mirroring the project proposal through a short, agreed and concise description of the project’s offering. This is a simple socialisation activity, which contributes to internal project alignment. To capture the purpose and goals, we gathered related information from the project proposal and organised it in a living document according to the following points:

- **Purpose:** a broad description of the objectives of the project
- **Challenges:** as linked to the purpose of the project, as emerging challenges identified in the first stages of the project
- **Goals:** A more specific description of the expected outcomes, as related to the purpose and challenges

These points are based on the communities of practice playbook, and are described in the following subsections. It is important to note, that these may evolve as the project progresses, and as the EECF gains traction and increases inter-activity.

### 2.2.1 Purpose

With relation to purpose, the following text has been adopted by community management to drive the vision of the EECF:

*“The EECF aims at **facilitating the communication** among public authorities on multiple governmental levels, while incorporating the perspective of community stakeholders and business managers.*

*To address this, ECOEMPOWER is engaged in the development of One Stop Shops (OSS) for the uptake of energy communities in five regions in Europe. Hence, ECOEMPOWER results already provide a path towards achieving the envisioned link among said entities. Moreover, and on the one hand, ECOEMPOWER results address business modelling and optimisation tools, which enable for energy community stakeholders to self-determine the “functioning and shape” of their energy communities, while aiming at the best possible business outcomes. On the other hand, the ECOEMPOWER results also address regulatory frameworks and related measures to improve the conditions for the uptake of energy communities in the different regions, facilitating the conversation from the public authority perspective. Finally, ECOEMPOWER develops participatory approaches, providing the social tools to allow for the interaction among stakeholders to take place through proven methods.*

*Through a multi-stakeholder dialogue, we aim at **enabling the establishment of successful energy communities** on local and regional levels. Additionally, we aim at **supporting capacity building activities**, which are related to facilitating the formation and evolution of energy communities and the enabling frameworks (including OSSs). By **contributing to the knowledge base** and to the application of best practices, we aim at staying at the forefront for the formation of OSSs and energy communities in Europe.*

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*By **disseminating project results**, fostering a healthy dialogue between the relevant stakeholders, and supporting the replication of energy communities and OSSs, we will strive at **motivating other regions in Europe to adopt the ECOEMPOWER approach**.*

*As always, with the overarching goal of supporting the energy transition through stakeholder participation, dialogue and (ECO)EMPOWERment.”*

As one might appreciate, the purpose of the project is tightly linked to the opportunities which a knowledge and community platform provides. Such a platform is tightly linked to communication and dissemination of results, by the term of “knowledge sharing” (including video recordings of webinars and workshops), it directly contributes to the aforementioned capacity building activities and the knowledge base.

## 2.2.2 Challenges

With relation to challenges, the following text has been adopted by community management to drive the vision of the EECP:

*“When talking about public authorities on multiple governmental levels, as well as a broad stakeholder base involved in the formation of energy communities, we recognize the challenge of **aligning the needs and interests of the stakeholder base including the perspective of governance**. For this reason, we aim at targeting both direct and indirect participants. Namely, target groups and the stakeholder ecosystem as outlined below. This will not only allow for us to deliver on our purpose and goals, but also to stay up to date and aligned with developments outside of the project’s direct line of action.*

*While we know the partners involved in the project, EECP participation is yet to be determined. We recognise the challenge of **tailoring EECP activities to the active membership**, and will focus our efforts in addressing this challenge through digital tools and EECP generated data.*

*Additionally, due to **language barriers**, relevant outcomes and dissemination materials may need to be reproduced in the languages of the ECOEMPOWER regional ecosystems, challenge which will be assessed, and materials generated accordingly.*

*To deal with the **dynamic landscape** of energy communities, ECOEMPOWER results will be presented as tools which enable stakeholders to tackle this dynamism and facilitate the multi-stakeholder dialogue. Additionally, the **inherent complexity** in the formation of decentralised and participatory energy (sub-)systems, such energy communities, is a challenge which will need to be addressed in harmony with its own dynamism. Hence, simplicity in addressing dynamism and complexity will be sought for.*

*The **capacity** of local and regional authorities to build enabling frameworks, which include OSSs in their design, while addressing the aforementioned diversity, dynamism and complexity, is a challenge which will also be addressed; and, with it, the potential for the **EECP to be sustainable** after the project ends.”*

As described above, energy communities face challenges ranging from governance at multiple governmental levels, through to empowering citizens to interact with a context which is highly socio-technical and reaches their doorsteps. ECOEMPOWER platform aims at simplifying this conversation by focusing on developing a language which addresses these different levels of abstraction, to be able to empower citizens in joining the conversation. The business and policy languages take a prominent role. As these reach the lowest levels of governance, namely those under the responsibility of local and regional authorities, the potential for energy communities to interact with governance emerges. This directly addresses questions of energy democracy, as it provides the knowledge base required to engage in said conversations. In turn, empowering energy community members with a voice in the co-creation of socio-technical systems. The intricacies of local and regional governance (*deliverable 4.3 Report on frameworks for cooperative energy supply organizations that can be improved on local and regional*

level) have been addressed in the project, as have those at the national and European levels (*deliverable 4.2 – Summary of national frameworks for the establishment of collective and cooperative energy supply systems on local and regional level*). Additionally, the conceptual description of energy community business classes (*deliverable 4.1 – Classification of organisational forms for collective and cooperative energy supply and their typical business models*) has been carefully developed. Bringing the two together may enable for the project to not only empower citizens, but also the stakeholder networks which are active at the regional and local levels. This knowledge is being currently discussed with relation to other work packages and will take part in the EECP's conversation.

The challenges of providing knowledge in different languages, as well as tailoring the activities to the active membership will be given serious consideration and efforts will be channelled accordingly.

### 2.2.3 Goals

With relation to goals, the following text has been adopted by community management to drive the vision of the EECP:

*“To be able to materialise the purpose of the EECP and address its challenges, we have defined a set of goals to aim at. These goals are the following:*

1. **Allow for the outreach to 100 replicators** from local entities interested in replicating the experience of **the local energy communities** set up in the project, facilitated by multipliers like the ones included under the external ecosystem depicted below.
2. **Develop coherent and simple communication materials** for the utilisation and uptake of **ECOEMPOWER results**.
3. **Provide approach for the integrated usage of the results** of ECOEMPOWER (currently, envisaged through EECP groups 1 and 2).
4. **Provide recommendations for policy makers and regulators**, e.g. through the four policy briefs of T4.5.”

The first goal has been achieved. The second goal is underway. The outcome of the second goal is an input for the third goal. Additionally, background materials and activities related to the third goal are being developed and have been stated in *deliverable 7.7 – Sustainability, Exploitation and Replication Strategy - revision*. Similarly, the strategy to reach the fourth goal is under development.

## 2.3 The EECP's place in the world

One of the most important parts of developing a vision for a knowledge community is a clear identification of boundaries. These boundaries are not set in stone, but help guide the community's members in understanding their relationship to target groups and ecosystem entities which ultimately justify the community's existence in the world. Complementing section 2.2 above, this section will describe the outcome of the activities related to understanding the EECP's place in the world. The following figure is a summary of the results:

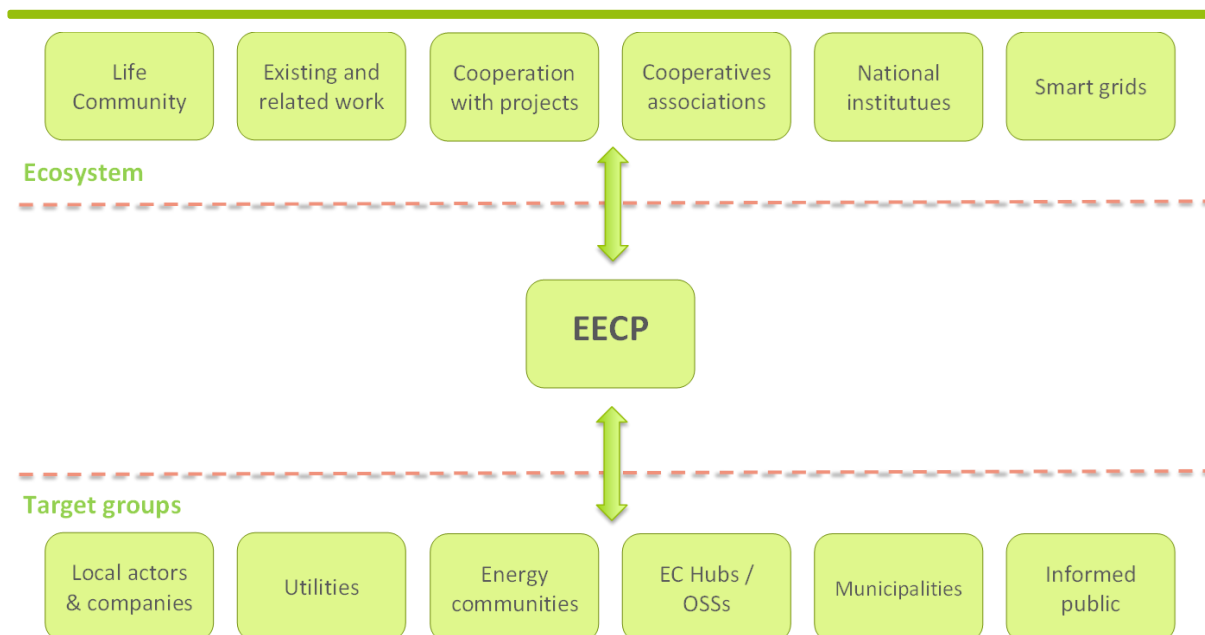


Figure 1. EECP's ecosystem and target groups

### 2.3.1 Target groups and stakeholders

On the bottom part of Figure 1, above, we see a simplified depiction of ECOEMPOWER's target groups. These target groups shape the purpose of the EECP's working groups (EECP Group-1 and EECP Group-2). One could group the target groups above according to the two working groups as follows:

- **EECP Group-1:** Support for One Stop Shops
  - Utilities
  - EC Hubs / OSSs
  - Municipalities
  - Local actors and companies
- **EECP Group-2:** Services for Energy Communities
  - Energy communities
  - Informed public

Albeit some EECP Group-1 target groups (namely, municipalities, utilities, local actors and companies who are members of an energy community), could be interested in promoting services (external or own) to the energy communities in which they participate as members.

With this in perspective, the EECP Group-1 has a focus on elaborating partnerships and networks of actors for the facilitation of energy community growth, while EECP Group-2 has a focus on existing and emerging energy communities. Through this structure, we aim at gaining insight into both the organisational perspective facilitating energy community growth, and the actual experience of the service receiver. That being said, a closer look into these target groups, e.g. through different energy community member profiles and OSS facilitator's roles, is planned to better comprehend the intricacies of each. A quick insight into such approach can be gained through the table below:

Table 1. Example of target groups and segmentation

Target Groups	Segments
<b>Local actors</b>	Local authority, local banks, energy community, local utility, local associations (e.g. sports, culture)
<b>Regional actors</b>	Regional authority, regional banks, energy community (umbrella), regional utility, energy agencies, ESCOs
<b>Multi-level actors</b>	Consultants, SMEs (e.g. installers, technicians), civil society associations, NGOs, solution providers

Given that policy makers at all levels are relevant, it is important to distinguish which of these may be considered as a target group, and which have a more prominent role in the ecosystem of the EECF. As initiators of OSSs, local and regional authorities are a target group, while national and EU policy makers play a part in the ecosystem of the EECF.

As a preliminary insight into our upcoming exchanges, we have identified two main categories in our OSS target groups. Namely, that some of the related target group segments can be considered OSS initiators, while others can be understood as multipliers, as follows:

- **OSS initiators**
  - Energy agencies
  - Local authorities (e.g. city mayor)
  - Regional authorities
- **Multipliers**
  - Finance providers and investors
  - Energy consultants
  - Municipal infrastructure operators

These differences will be further explored, according to the role which each segment plays in the facilitation of an organisational network which enables the swift formation of energy communities in a given region or context.

### 2.3.2 Networks and Ecosystem

The networks and ecosystem view on the EECF is one with a higher level of abstraction. The way in which networks and ecosystem actors interact is not necessarily easy to identify given the diversity of networks, their changing involvement on certain topics (due to the market for attention, which networks tend to target), their diverse organisational structures, and the termination of some, as well as the emergence of others. For that reason, it is of utmost importance to communicate the dynamics of our specific context with the project partners early on. The paragraphs below, as well as the following figure 2, describe the relationships which the EECF is envisioned to have to its ecosystem, and the networks (i.e. organisations) which are involved therein:

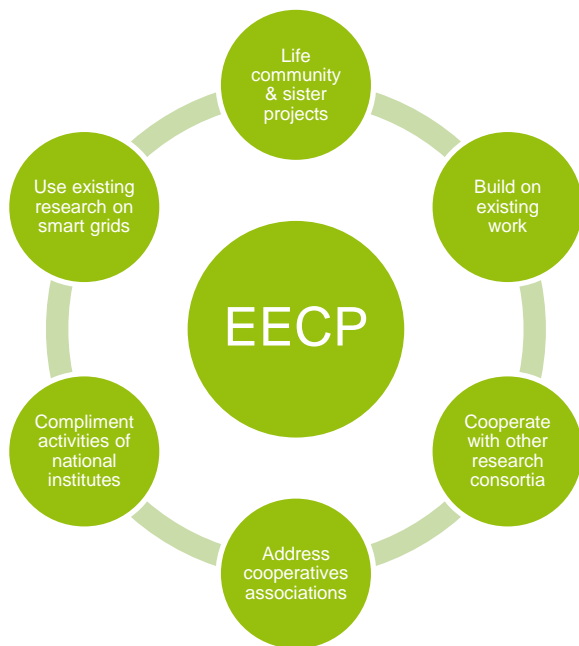


Figure 2. EECp ecosystem relationships

**Network with the life community:** exchange, coordinate and find synergies with other similar projects dealing with energy communities on matters of policy and legislation, promote our events and activities, and participate in the forum for exchanging tools to facilitate the formation of energy communities.

**Build on existing work and integrate into activities:** An assessment of existing tools and prior work emerging from past projects will be carried out in the scope of the EECp to be able to best promote said tools and work through the EECp, as well as to share these results with other initiatives, aiming at exploiting, or maximising the impact of the work.

**Cooperate with projects:** ECOEMPOWER will invite members from other projects and develop a sound strategy to communicate our efforts to these

members; so as to enable for them to attend events and activities, and interact in the easiest possible way. Not only will they be invited to get familiar with our efforts, but the activities and events will be designed so as to facilitate the participation of members from other projects in their development. We will offer these projects a place for exchanging experiences and for promoting their own results.

**Integrate activities with cooperatives associations:** The EECp will seek to integrate its activities with the work of cooperatives associations, to exploit potential synergies and increase the attractiveness of ECOEMPOWER results for existing organisations who are potential beneficiaries thereof. This will involve both the promotion of ECOEMPOWER results, as well as the involvement and exploration of the association’s activities by EECp members.

**Compliment activities of national institutes:** Similarly to the previous point, the EECp will align its activities with those of national institutes involved in supporting and/or studying energy communities and OSSs.

**Integrate smart grid related topics:** As a driver for the deployment energy communities, smart grid related topics will fuel the activities of the EECp, to bring the conversation of the EECp to the state-of-the-art with regards to the energy transition. This will enable for us to prepare the activities of the EECp in a forward looking and fit for future way.

### 3 Activities Implemented

At the moment, the activities of the EECP have been fully led by the EECP Group-3 on community management and communication. The reason for this is, that most of the activities which we have carried out until now are related to initiating the platform both technically and organisationally.

#### 3.1 Development and setup of the platform

As the platform adjusts to the requirements of the project, modifications and adjustments arise. These are mainly addressed by members of the EECP Group-3, in collaboration with the platform development team. In other words, community management is the point of contact to the developers, for incorporating partners' envisioned opportunities and needs.



Figure 3. Screenshot of the EECP website showing the community webpage

The ECOEMPOWER Knowledge and Community Platform, publicly available at [www.ecoempower.eu](http://www.ecoempower.eu), offers features for sharing information, networking, communication, and task organization. Additionally, our platform provides spaces for uploading tools and organises events to discuss on their use and improvement.

#### 3.2 Content creation

To initiate knowledge sharing, the consortium focused on different approaches for content creation. First, the working structure/working groups of the EECP were organised. Next, the consortium is working on generating “fact sheets” related to ECOEMPOWER results through the support of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. Finally, we are developing the toolbox of the EECP in such a way that it is tailored to the results of the project (different tool hosting approaches). These three are explained in the following sub-sections.

##### 3.2.1 Organisational structure

As a first step in formalising the organisational structure, the platform has been structured through three groups. These groups are the following:

- **EECP Group-1:** Support for One Stop Shops

- **EECP Group-2:** Services for Energy Communities
- **EECP Group-3:** Community Management & Communication (Closed Group for Consortium Members)

Group-3 is the first one to be active, as it has been driving the efforts of gathering knowledge and addressing the challenges and governance of the platform. Group-3 proposed the use of the communities of practice playbook as an organisational tool, as well as managed the activities related to the vision, target groups and ecosystem.

The other two groups were formed after the aforementioned activities on the vision, ecosystem and target groups had taken place. This was helpful to make a decision on how to structure the working groups, because it was based on a common knowledge basis.

### 3.2.2 Fact Sheets

The factsheets are a quick and easy way to sum up the findings of the project activities. These factsheets have been developed through the use of AI-tools, and have been revised with the partners responsible for each corresponding result. They will be uploaded to the EECP as results emerge.



Figure 4. Snapshot of factsheet summarising deliverable 3.1 results

### 3.2.3 Toolbox

The toolbox is a direct point of access to ECOEMPOWER results, as well as results from other organisations which are relevant to the project. Currently, there have been two tools uploaded, and more are under development and/or discussion. This is related to the nature of each tool.

Research results can be understood as tools, but this fails to address the different types of results and their ease of use. In ECOEMPOWER we have a business plan template, as well as a time planning tool and a business modelling tool tailored to energy communities in the form of word documents and excel files. These are easy to upload and share. Other types of tools, e.g. online dashboards or energy community optimisation software, will be hosted in the EECP through a tailored approach to maximise usability and platform user-friendliness. In other words, these considerations aim at improving the user experience.

## 3.3 Community engagement activities

To engage the EECP with the outside world, we have four conferences planned. In these conferences we will attempt at addressing the most pressing issues related to energy community and one stop shop formation, going from the multi-level policy frameworks, through to why energy communities are needed, how energy

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communities interact with system operation and with the energy markets. Another potential topic is how energy communities enable for citizens to engage with EU data policies and the relatively new data strategy.

Another activity to engage the external actors with the EECP is the development of user stories. The development of these stories requires a solid knowledge basis, a shared common vision and consensus on key aspects of the project among project members. For that reason, preliminary activities which set the stage for the creation of these stories should precede them. This is not only the aforementioned creation of the vision, but also the strengthening of said vision. Considering the strengthening of the vision leads to the development of simple messages for each target group, the subsequent development of user stories should be more effective both in terms of story production and attractiveness for the target groups.

For the reader to envision how these stories might look like, topics such as the impact of energy communities on distribution system operation from the perspective of the ECOEMPOWER offering may be addressed. More specifically, although as an example, explanations of the relationship between ECOEMPOWER business models, the actors involved, the insights provided to each actor through the energy and ICT tool, potential implementations of engagement methodologies, and the partnerships an OSS can form to maximise impact, can all form part of a single story.

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## 4 Results Achieved

The platform is currently at the start-up phase.

- Toolbox has been initiated
- Eight different EECF-related documents have been uploaded through the group specific webpages, with four being under the EECF Group-1 (Support for One Stop Shops) webpage, and the other two groups having two uploads each.
- Communication with similar projects on energy communities for organising knowledge exchange activities and other types of interaction has been successfully carried out.
- We have reached the target of 100 letters of intent signed by potential replicators and interested parties.

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## 5 Challenges and Lessons Learned

To start, the challenge of gaining attention from potential members in a specialised environment (i.e. research and development) with **too much offering for the demand** available (i.e. offering community platforms). In other words, many researchers and practitioners see no gain in participating in yet another platform. This could be solved by organising platforms which bring different (similar) projects together, and which can be adopted by a new management team once one project stops being active, giving continuity to the efforts in a specific space. Aside from people's interest in participating, it is also not easy to find the right channels to promote the platform. For that reason, **giving the platform visibility** adds on top of the aforementioned challenge. In an environment of competition, it is difficult to create synergetic links to other networks. Incentives for collaboration based on impact creation seem to be lacking.

Keeping **the project's link to its ecosystem** in focus contributes to making results more actionable. Nevertheless, it is a considerable challenge to do so without having extensive experience in project-related research work. For example, even if the work of another ecosystem actor (i.e. another network) relates to that of the ECOEMPOWER project, creating effective links to those other networks should be visualised, prioritised and communicated early on. This could lead to avoiding re-work, and relates to identifying the relevant literature emerging from other networks, as well as the relevant members or departments of the other networks. Moreover, the availability of said members is likely to be limited, and offering attractive opportunities for interaction and/or exchange is more easily achieved through coherent proposals, requiring e.g. experience or existing relationships.

The challenge of **creating content** for knowledge sharing is currently being tackled in an inexpensive way through the use of AI tools. Often, videos or infographics are developed in cooperation with a creative enterprise to show a project's proposal, but these come at a price and are limited in their scope. In other words, it is not easy to address multiple project results because of the price. One has to be very assertive in selecting a point of focus. For that reason, one creates only a small window into the project. We have chosen to address this challenge in such a way, that we can communicate different results quickly. Text is not the most attractive of formats, but accompanying figures and quick facts may help achieve the understanding which is required for external members to join the conversation.

The **role of emerging platforms** is not necessarily well established. In the context of societal transformations for sustainability (i.e. not a profit oriented endeavour), innovation is supported by citizens and governments. Businesses engage when potential profits have been identified. The last 30 years of a transformation have brought a new perspective to investment: the trust in policy commitments for the support of solutions to societal challenges in different sectors (e.g. through the growth of ESG practices or the support of renewables). Even when considering the inherent risk in innovation, one may recognise this risk is addressed and reduced through government commitments. This, in turn, brings an argument for the formation of platforms to address such societal challenges. We must remember that the path behind us is not that long, and platforms have proven themselves to be valuable. Innovation grows through collaboration and collaboration potentially happens through platforms of knowledge exchange such as the EECF. How such platforms may look like in the future is yet to be determined. A certain degree of harmonisation in working approaches could be very useful for reducing the challenges of participation. The latter which, is provided by the communities of practice playbook.

**Internal alignment** is often challenging in research projects, but the opportunities are worth the struggle. Work package leaders and exploitable result "owners" may work independently or in small groups. Hence, the

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synergies between work packages may be missed; leading to difficulties in subsequent steps, as well as scattered project results.

A platform such as the EECF lives from co-creation, and leadership roles increase involvement in co-creation activities. For that reason, the interaction of the community management team with the project leadership and coordination becomes crucial for the success of the platform at the early stages. This may be improved further by identifying opportunities in relevant areas for project alignment. Additionally, catering to all partner's interests and priorities has to be taken very seriously. Hence, the central role of the development of the common vision, target groups and ecosystem, as well as its strengthening through additional activities. Strengthening the vision, in this sense, means to revisit the vision continuously throughout the project, while simultaneously generating valuable outcomes to present to the outside world. As much as the EECF Group-3 takes the role of the EECF network administration organisation, the hierarchy of the EECF is considered to be flat and may only present emerging leadership roles as the project progresses, enabling a hierarchy to form organically.

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## 6 Identified technical or operational challenges

Limited budget makes it difficult to create new websites with tailored functionality, as well as to invest time in planning activities and other actions in the development of the platform. For this reason, readily available and inexpensive solutions would be of great value. Similarly, solutions such as the communities of practice playbook, which serves as a guide to organise activities, are a great tool to alleviate the challenge of managing the formation of such a platform.

Community management and communications should not be underestimated. Creating effective links to the ecosystem, developing target group materials, reaching the target groups themselves, and organising tailored activities to address a project's needs is not a light task. Moreover, the aforementioned elements do not encompass all of the responsibilities of community management. For the case of emerging project platforms, one has to consider that platforms may not be at all active in any phase (i.e. phases of the communities of practice playbook) if these are not pursued by community management (hence, the relevance of closely collaborating with project coordination).

Without a clear view on how to achieve this, a potential solution related to the aforementioned closer collaboration with project coordination, is to consider community platforms as social points of interaction with a focus on collaboration. After often encountering the lack of interest in “yet another discussion”, even when the topic seems obviously relevant and a discussion necessary, one may wonder why there is such a friction in collaboration. Even if it may be a lot easier to have a discussion with people one trusts, as opposed to discussing with unfamiliar faces. For that reason, strategizing around the social factor of research projects may give an additional value to community platforms from the perspective of alleviating the difficulties found in such collaboration frameworks. For example, through the careful separation and orchestration of individual and interactive work streams.

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## 7 Next Steps and Future Developments

As recommended by the Communities of Practice Playbook, the consortium will follow the three phases of community formation. Namely, knowledge sharing, discussion and service provision. The last stage is envisioned as an outcome of the discussions, and one of the last steps of the project. Meaning, that service provision will not necessarily be carried out, but instead a concept for it, with a corresponding business analysis, will be described under *Deliverable 7.8 – Sustainability, Exploitation and Replication Action Plan*.

Considering that the first phase of community formation is the internal organisation of the community, the consortium is working on strengthening the vision, by creating material for the development and co-creation of stories to be used for communication (i.e. preliminary material for story co-creation). These stories will be used as a basis for knowledge sharing and external stakeholder engagement. The stories will be tailored to both ecosystem members (i.e. external organisations and associations involved in related topics), and to target groups.

In parallel, the platform is defining a time plan of activities and interactions which will be taking place throughout the project. For each activity, a revised and consistent vocabulary will be used, to ensure that new terms which are relevant to upcoming activities are considered, and that these reach activity participants in due time and in an efficient way.

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## 8 Conclusion

The work involved herein builds on previous experience related to knowledge community management from BAUM. This experience led the consortium to pursue the development of a solid foundation of common understanding internally, so as to initiate EECP work and interaction. For that reason, what we perceive to be the initial stages of EECP formation have been addressed and described in this deliverable. The challenges faced and lessons learned were partly expected and, hence, the insights therein are considered to be relevant to other projects, regardless of the context these may be engaged in.

The next steps will require more interaction and engagement. These steps will be the actual testing of the approach, and will materialise by engaging community members in fruitful discussions which bring ECOEMPOWER results closer to impact generation, finally aiming to propose EECP services for multiple regions across the European Union, and extending the activities of the platform beyond the project lifetime.

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## 11 List of Abbreviations

- ❖ **AI:** Artificial Intelligence
- ❖ **DSO:** Distribution System Operator
- ❖ **EECP:** ECOEMPOWER Community Platform
- ❖ **ESCO:** Energy Service Company
- ❖ **ESG:** Environmental, Social and Governance
- ❖ **EU:** European Union
- ❖ **JRC:** Joint Research Centre
- ❖ **NGO:** Non-governmental Organisation
- ❖ **OSS:** One Stop Shop
- ❖ **SME:** Small and Medium Enterprise

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