

# What's culture got to do with energy consumption?

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An EU initiative has launched an online interactive data set of sustainable energy initiatives across Europe. The database could help policymakers reduce greenhouse gas emissions and decarbonise the economy.

The use of [energy](#) is influenced by cultural practices and daily routines like the way we light, heat, cool, clean, wash, cook, commute and shop. Understanding how these habits directly affect energy consumption is crucial to reach climate and energy targets. The EU-funded ENERGISE

project is addressing this challenge by developing, testing and assessing options for a bottom-up transformation of energy use in households and communities throughout Europe.

The international team of researchers backed by ENERGISE has recently conducted a systematic classification of over 1 000 existing sustainable energy consumption initiatives (SECIs) from 30 European countries. The team has put this data in an open access online database. It informs users about the content, scale and objectives of SECIs that specifically address final consumption. The database also provides an assessment of how the challenge of addressing excessive energy consumption is understood, as explained in a [press release](#) on the project website. The team hopes that the database and interactive map will be an "invaluable resource for energy practitioners, researchers, community groups or anyone seeking good practice examples of energy initiatives from all over Europe."

## **Cultural impact**

SECIs are defined as activities that deal with reducing energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from households by targeting actual energy use, or substituting fossil fuels with [renewable energy sources](#). They include an active involvement of households. SECIs on the database have been divided into four overall categories according to their main approach to the challenge of realising sustainable energy consumption. This is referred to as 'problem framing typology'.

In the 'changes in technology' category, the main goal is to reduce energy consumption levels through technological innovation. According to the 'changes in individuals' behaviour' classification, it's assumed that changing levels of energy use is a matter of changing individuals' behaviour in terms of their personal energy use. The 'changes in everyday life situations' category includes cases where changing levels of

energy use is a matter of changing material components, images/norms and competences related to specific areas of daily life. Another category is called 'changes in complex interactions', where it's assumed that changing levels of energy use involves changing complex interactions between several areas of household-related activities, professions and sectors.

The ENERGISE team argues that according to an increasing body of research, 'complex interactions' and 'everyday life situations' initiatives and programmes that treat energy consumption as a result of social practices and complex interactions between changes in technology, business models, services, and the social and temporal organisation of everyday life are more likely to bring about meaningful and lasting changes in energy [consumption](#) than those focusing on 'individual behaviour' and 'technologies' only. As the ENERGISE team's research reveals, "only a small number of the SECIs reviewed are in this category."

The ongoing ENERGISE (European Network for Research, Good Practice and Innovation for Sustainable Energy) project was set up to empirically investigate socioeconomic, cultural, political and gender aspects of energy transition. It also examines how routines and ruptures shape or reshape household energy practices. To achieve these aims, ENERGISE uses the Living Labs approach in a real-world setting to test both household and community-level initiatives. Some 16 Living Labs in 8 partner countries contribute to the design and assessment of future [energy consumption](#) initiatives across Europe.

**More information:** ENERGISE project website: [www.energise-project.eu/](http://www.energise-project.eu/)

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