



Community Energy for Energy Solidarity: Evaluation of the CEES pilot projects

Les 7 Vents chapter

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CEES
COMMUNITY ENERGY FOR
ENERGY SOLIDARITY

Introduction

The CEES project and the CEES evaluation

In the Community Energy for Energy Solidarity (CEES)¹ project, six energy communities implemented six pilot projects to alleviate energy poverty, including projects to diversify sources of funding for this work. Knowledge exchange and mutual support between the energy communities was a key component of the six pilots. Within CEES, such projects are referred to as a form of energy solidarity. Led by the University of Birmingham, the CEES team implemented a comprehensive evaluation of the six pilot projects.

Evaluation materials

The following evaluation materials are available at www.energysolidarity.eu/evaluation:

- A short summary of the evaluation findings
- The Full evaluation report (232pp)
- The Executive summary (15pp)
- Individual documents of each of the evaluations of the six CEES pilot projects, plus an additional project that was evaluated through CEES.
- The full Evaluation framework (60pp)

About this document

This document contains the evaluation of the pilot project that was implemented by Les 7 Vents, France. In the Full evaluation report, this is Chapter 9 and begins on p156.

Key terms in this document

Energy poverty

The situation in which households are unable to access affordable energy services (such as adequate warmth, cooling, lighting, and energy to power appliances), which underpin elements of human flourishing (such as health and wellbeing, relationships, social inclusion, employment, recreation and education). (Day et al.,2016)².

¹ The CEES project received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 101026972. The project commenced in June 2021 and ran to the end of August 2024.

² Day, R. et al (2016) Conceptualising energy use and energy poverty using a capabilities framework, Energy Policy, 93: 255–264.



Energy communities

Local collectives of individuals that tend to share values and ambitions relating to: supporting equitable, democratic and fair transitions towards more local, sustainable and efficient energy systems; establishing renewable and decentralised energy systems; assisting local community members with energy efficiency, demand reduction and energy poverty; or economic activity on energy for social and community benefit. These organisations are diverse in structure, size and scope.

Energy solidarity

Actors willingly working in ways that align, on a shared goal of overcoming energy-related adversity that is experienced by one or more of the parties. Energy solidarity is inspired by empathy and / or a sense of justice, and may, but does not have to, involve reciprocal obligation. Stronger solidarity involves a more sustained commitment, and / or a willingness to incur a higher personal cost in pursuit of the shared goal. (Day and Burchell, 2023)³

Fund mechanism

Fund mechanisms are employed to raise funds or income to fund work on energy poverty alleviation.

Identify mechanism

Identify mechanisms aim to seek out and identify households in energy poverty, recruit them to projects and assess their eligibility for projects.

Alleviate ('soft' and 'hard') mechanism

Alleviate mechanisms aim to alleviate energy poverty. 'Soft' alleviation mechanisms do this through household engagement, provision of advice about energy poverty, energy efficiency measures, the provision of energy kits consisting of a variety of small energy efficiency measures (such as window insulation material) and support applying for financial support. 'Hard' alleviation mechanisms alleviate energy poverty through building renovation, retrofitting and refurbishment. In CEES, hard alleviation was undertaken in one pilot project. Several of the CEES pilot projects include recruitment and training for energy advisers. These activities have been included as part of the Alleviate mechanisms.

³ Day, R. and K. Burchell (2023) Energy solidarity in Energy Communities: alleviating energy poverty and supporting just energy transitions through solidarity approaches. European Sociological Association RN12 mid-term and Energy and Society Network 6th international joint conference, 'Energy, Environment and Societies in Crises', 6-8 September 2023, Trento, Italy.

Les 7 Vents



1. Summary (EO1)

The evaluation report addresses the following mechanisms.

The new CEES mechanisms

1. **Fund:** test and tailor microdonations mechanism (inspired by Energie Solidaire)⁴ and – as necessary – investigate other fundraising mechanisms.
2. **Alleviate - hard:** implementation of a Shared and Supported Self-Renovation (3SR) programme (inspired by [Enerterre](#)). 3SR involves householders working with local professional tradespeople and volunteers (who are often previous beneficiaries or planned future beneficiaries of the 3SR approach) to engage in energy efficient and sustainable renovation and refurbishment of their homes. The labour costs are lower within the 3SR approach due to the work that is undertaken by the householder and the volunteers. Within the Les 7 Vents 3SR programme, this approach was targeted towards people in energy poverty.

Associated mechanism

3. **Identify:** Households that appeared to be in energy poverty and might be suitable for 3SR were referred to the Les 7 Vents 3SR team by the Les 7 Vents' team of energy advisors. This was followed by assessments of the suitability for 3SR by the Les 7 Vents 3SR team.

⁴ The Energie Solidaire model allows energy customers to give a microdonation as part of their energy bills.



Evaluation summary

Fund

In common with several other CEES pilot partners, Les 7 Vents sought to diversify its sources of funding beyond grant funding. Also in common with other pilots, Les 7 Vents was inspired by Enercoop's Energie Solidaire microdonations approach. Since it does not have its own customers, and therefore could not implement such a scheme, Les 7 Vents decided to pursue microdonations schemes with local builders' merchants and DIY (do it yourself) stores and with local builders and craftspeople. The idea was that members of the public would have the option to add a microdonation when they bought materials or services from these suppliers and tradespeople.

Les 7 Vents experienced considerable challenges in these efforts. A key challenge was that Les 7 Vents is not constituted in a way that allows it to provide tax relief on donations, although a way around this would have been possible in partnership with Enerterre, which is able to do this (Enerterre is also the local partner that inspired Les 7 Vents to focus on shared and supported self-renovation in its Alleviate mechanism). In the case of the builders' merchants and DIY stores, further challenges included a geographical mismatch between the local focus of Les 7 Vents and the national scope of the larger chains, coupled with the complexities and costs of setting up such a scheme for independent outlets. This latter challenge also applied to efforts with local builders and craftspeople. As a result of these challenges, Les 7 Vents was not able to implement these plans for fundraising.

As the CEES project progressed – and the Les 7 Vents team gained experience and expertise with respect to energy poverty alleviation – the organisation was able to demonstrate a track record in new funding bids. In early 2024, Les 7 Vents learned that it had been successful in securing up to €210,000 from a French government scheme called [Stop à l'Exclusion Energétique](#) to work on energy poverty alleviation over three years. In June 2024, discussions for further funding from this scheme are ongoing. This funding is described in more detail in the Fund section.

Alleviate

Les 7 Vents' Alleviate mechanism was a hard/renovation approach known Shared and Supported Self-Renovation (3SR) (this was inspired by Enerterre). 3SR involves householders working with local professional tradespeople and volunteers to engage in energy efficient and sustainable renovation of their homes at a lower cost than would be possible otherwise.

It is important to note that, due to the costs and intensive work involved, the number of households in a renovation/hard Alleviate mechanism is always likely to be smaller than in a mechanism based around energy advice and small measures. Thus, during the CEES project, Les 7 Vents was able to sign contracts with five households; four of these projects were implemented in 2023 and one was implemented in 2024.

Les 7 Vents was able to interview the four households whose projects were implemented in 2023. These interviews show that the support of Les 7 Vents to co-ordinate and implement the four worksites was highly valued by the householders and that the worksites were able to achieve much more and at a much lower cost than would have been possible without the 3SR approach. The households also reported expectations of longer term financial benefits as well as appreciation of the personal benefits of being supported by volunteers and the invaluable input of the professionals.

That said, the householders also reported that being the host of a 3SR project can be very stressful and tiring. In terms of planning, despite the support of Les 7 Vents, it was often challenging to co-ordinate the professional craftspeople, the volunteers and the materials to be in the right place at the right time. In addition, Les 7 Vents found that there was insufficient capacity among local tradespeople in the context of the ongoing work of Enerterre. During the worksite itself, households reported that welcoming and catering for a group of volunteers is time-consuming and expensive (in terms of providing food). Despite these challenges, all four of the households spoke of very positive experiences.

Identify

Households that might be suitable for 3SR, because they appeared to be in energy poverty, were referred to the Les 7 Vents 3SR team by the Les 7 Vents team of energy advisors. This was followed by assessments of the suitability for 3SR by the 3SR team. The 3SR team reported that there appeared to be difficulties with some of the energy advisors, who seemed unenthusiastic about making referrals; this was perhaps because they had not been included in the CEES Horizon 2020 application process. Further, the way in which the energy advisors are paid by the French government scheme had recently changed from per hour to per action (e.g. home visit or phone call); this was already placing unhelpful pressure on the energy advisors to conduct shorter home visits and the 3SR work could well have been seen as an additional unwelcome burden. In practice, only five of the twelve energy advisors made referrals. Nonetheless, the Les 7 Vents 3SR team was able to exceed its targets. The 3SR team reported that the assessment processes, by telephone and in home visits, was successful but very time-consuming to implement.

Legacy

On funding, in addition to success with a grant funding bid, Les 7 Vents is also planning to continue working on two avenues for funding work on energy poverty. First, in 2021 and 2022, a Les 7 Vents staff member underwent training as a Corporate Social Responsibility and [Environment, Social and Governance](#) consultant. Les 7 Vents intends to offer this consultancy service to local companies and, as part of this, to encourage companies to make donations to Enerterre to support 3SR. Second, giving the customers of local builders the option of paying a microdonation – or, to put it another way, to pay a ‘solidarity rate’ – to support work on energy poverty. Les 7 Vents will learn directly about this approach from another French organisation that has implemented such a scheme. In addition, Les 7 Vents is now in a good position to seek further grant funding for this work.

On Alleviate, the key legacy of the CEES project is that Les 7 Vents is now in a position to seek further grant funding for this work. Largely due to the tradespeople capacity challenge described above, Les 7 Vents does not plan to continue with its own 3SR projects. However, it will continue to promote and refer households to the Enerterre 3SR scheme.

2. Introduction (EO1)

About Les 7 Vents

Based in rural Normandy, France, [Les 7 Vents](#) provides individuals and organisations with advice and support for projects on energy transitions and sustainable lifestyles. Les 7 Vents has a team of 12 energy advisors who work with households on energy efficiency, largely through home visits. The area in which Les 7 Vents works is characterised by many residential buildings that are constructed using earth and are very inefficient with respect to heating loss. In combination with the precariousness livelihoods that are common in this rural and relatively remote area, this leads to widespread energy poverty.

The Les 7 Vents pilot project

As described above, the evaluation report addresses the Fund mechanism, an Identify mechanism and an Alleviate (hard) mechanism that were implemented in CEES.

Timings

	2022			2023				2024	
	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2
Funding									
Identify: identification of households for 3SR									
Alleviate: co-ordination and implementation of 3SR projects									

Table 8.1. Timescales for the Les 7 Vents pilot project.

Organisational structure

The various elements of the Les 7 Vents pilot project were managed by a project manager and a delivery manager, both reporting to a Les 7 Vents director. Both of the managers joined Les 7 Vents during the CEES project, necessitating several project hand-overs. Although this is common challenge in projects, it is clear that this impacted on project delivery.



3. Fund (EO2)

Introduction

In common with several other CEES pilot projects, Les 7 Vents wanted to diversify its sources of funding beyond grant funding. The challenge with grant funding is that the funding has to be dedicated to specified activities within a specified timeframe; this means that it can be challenging to cover core costs and to respond to changing circumstances. Les 7 Vents added that applications for grant funding are time-consuming with no guarantee of success.

Microdonations and donations

Process

Also in common with other CEES pilot projects, Les 7 Vents was inspired by the Energie Solidaire microdonations model. However, since it does not have its own customers, Les 7 Vents quickly realised that this model was inappropriate for its own funding ambitions. With this in mind, Les 7 Vents began working with its local stakeholders to consider and investigate a range of potential approaches to funding:

- In partnership with local and regional builders' merchants and DIY (do it yourself) stores, a scheme to collect microdonations from customers. This was the focus of most of Les 7 Vents' work on financing.
- In partnership with a co-operative of local tradespeople, a scheme to collect microdonations from customers. In this case, the idea was that the donations would be used to buy building materials for 3SR projects and the tradespeople would provide labour on a voluntary basis. Les 7 Vents spent much less time on this idea.
- Corporate Social Responsibility donations from local companies.

Challenges

Les 7 Vents experienced a range of challenges with this work. First, due to the way in which it is incorporated, Les 7 Vents was not able to provide tax relief on donations. This is the same challenge that Enercoop experienced and led to Enercoop setting up Les Amis d'Enercoop as a charitable organisation that could collect donations. In response to this challenge, Les 7 vents considered partnering with Enerterre, which is already able to provide tax relief on donations. Within the context of working with Enerterre, another interesting challenge was that Enerterre had stringent ethical criteria, particularly relating to sustainability, for organisations that it would be willing to accept donations from.

Les 7 Vents spent a lot of time investigating options for microdonations from the customers of builders' merchants and DIY stores. A number of specific challenges were experienced here. Many outlets were

part of national chains and this was at odds with the local focus of Les 7 Vents. Some national chains already had donation schemes in place. At the other end of the scale, local independent stores were put off by the administrative burden and costs of a microdonations scheme. In addition, the two main French microdonations platforms collect their fees from the partner organisations (in this case, the merchants and stores); not surprisingly, this was also off-putting. On a different note, Les 7 Vents found that the 3SR concept was challenging and off-putting for some stores. One local builders' merchant offered to donate left over materials, however, this was considered impractical in terms of storage and matching the available materials with 3SR project needs.

Outcomes

Despite devoting considerable effort to this work, the challenges described above were insurmountable and Les 7 Vents was not able to raise funds in this way during the CEES project. Discussions with other organisations in France in the course of the work suggests that it take around 24 person-months to set up such a scheme from scratch, and this would not have been possible within the timeline of the project, regardless of other challenges.

Grant funding

As the CEES project progressed, Les 7 Vents' knowledge and experience with respect to energy poverty alleviation grew enormously. In addition, its network of local partners for this work had been strengthened. As a result of these developments, during 2023, Les 7 Vents was able to apply for grant funding for work on energy poverty.

In early 2024, Les 7 Vents learned that it had been successful in securing up to €210,000 from a French government scheme called [Stop à l'Exclusion Energétique](#) to work on energy poverty alleviation over three years. In June 2024, discussions for further funding from this scheme are ongoing. As part of this grant, two Les 7 Vents energy advisors will be trained as energy poverty alleviation specialists. These energy advisors will work in-depth on energy poverty alleviation with 30 households on in-depth energy poverty alleviation projects that will include energy efficiency advice, small measures, support with applying for grants and limited larger measures (such as insulation and efficient heating systems). Known as *ensemblier solidaires* (or solidarity contractors), they will also play a key role in building networks for local cooperative action on energy poverty. Les 7 Vents reported that securing this funding would not have been possible without participation in CEES.

4. Identifying households for 3SR (EO3)

Referrals from the Les 7 Vents energy advisors

Process

Les 7 Vents has a team of 12 energy advisors that advises households and businesses on energy demand reduction, renewables and other sustainability issues. The 3SR Identify process began with the 3SR team briefing the 12 Les 7 Vents energy advisors about 3SR and how to recognise potential beneficiaries of 3SR (in terms of the household's financial situation, and the building type and condition). This took place in June 2022. The 3SR team also liaised with some of the energy advisors on an ongoing basis to answer queries and minimise the number of inappropriate referrals. Thereafter, the plan was for the 12 energy advisors, in the course of their visits to households, to identify potential beneficiaries of 3SR and refer them to the 3SR team.

Challenges

The 3SR team reported difficulties among the energy advisors with respect to the additional work that they needed to do in the context of 3SR. A key reason for this was related to recent changes to the ways in which the energy advisors are funded and remunerated by the French government scheme. In the past, the energy advisors were remunerated by the government scheme by the hour. More recently, this was changed such that the energy advisors are remunerated by the action (home visit, telephone call or other meeting). This change in policy within the government scheme had already created pressure on the energy advisors to conduct shorter home visits in order to maintain a reasonable income. Within this already challenging context it is not surprising that the additional requirement to identify households for the 3SR project created further pressure among the energy advisors.

Les 7 Vents made the following comment:

'At the beginning it was really complicated to go and see the advisors and say, "Yes, we know that you are overwhelmed, but we would like to have more information from the people that you advise. This is the table of information we need to be filled." So, this was really difficult, and this is what we had to go through at the beginning of our 3SR mission.'

The role of the energy advisors in the 3SR project was decided by the directors of Les 7 Vents, without consultation with the energy advisors themselves. It is possible that greater engagement with the energy advisors while the 3SR project was being planned, might have alleviated some of these tensions. A further problem was that the energy advisors sometimes referred households that were clearly inappropriate for the CEES 3SR project. For instance, several of the referred households were interested in a 3SR project for a second home that they rent to tourists. Such misunderstandings required repeated briefing sessions. Nonetheless, the 3SR team was happy to report, *'I'm not really disappointed about that, I think it's normal at the beginning'*.



Outcomes

As a result of the difficulties with the energy advisors, the 3SR project managers noted that only five of the 12 energy advisors appeared to be meaningfully engaging with the 3SR project by providing referrals. Nonetheless, these energy advisors referred a total of 43 households to the 3SR team, which exceeded the target of 30⁵. It is important to note that some of the households that were referred already had renovation projects under way for between 1 and 3 years.

Pre-assessment of the households

Process

The process of pre-assessing the households took place on the telephone and was conducted by the 3SR team. At this stage in the process, the 3SR team assessed each household's eligibility for the Les 7 Vents 3SR programme on the basis of the presence or not of energy poverty. To clarify eligibility, Les 7 Vents used two definitions of energy poverty that are widely used in France. In the first of these, energy poverty is understood as when a household is spending more than 8% of its income on energy (the percentage was recently lowered from 10% to 8% in the French definition). The second definition defines energy poverty as when someone suffers from cold or heat in their house for 24 hours in a row during last year⁶. This assessment relied upon information provided by the householder and was often a very rough calculation. In addition, during the pre-assessment, the 3SR team established the readiness of the household for a 3SR project.

Challenges

Although this process went smoothly, the 3SR team noted that it was more time consuming than had been expected.

⁵ The targets in the Les 7 Vents 3SR programme were based on advice from Enerterre.

⁶ See further discussions of French definitions of energy poverty see:

<https://www.precarite-energie.org/comprendre-la-precarite-energetique/comment-ce-phenomene-est-il-observe-en-france/>

<https://www.territoires-climat.ademe.fr/ressource/45-16>

<https://www.cairn.info/revue-informations-sociales-2014-4-page-115.htm>.

Outcomes

Of the 43 households that were referred to the 3SR team, 18 did not go beyond the pre-assessment on the telephone. Three of these were because the household did not appear to be in energy poverty (one household that might not have been in energy poverty was taken forward to the full assessment stage because of the very poor health of the occupants). Other common reasons for not proceeding beyond the pre-assessment were that the household was not ready to proceed, the building had little or no potential for renovation, or it was not possible to contact the household. This meant that 25 households were considered to be suitable and eligible for the 3SR project and proceeded to the full assessment stage (compared to a target of 15) (see Table 8.2). It is worth noting that, despite the early challenges, the conversion rate was higher in the Les 7 Vents 3SR programme (58%) than had been expected based on the advice from Enerterre (50%).

	Target	Actual
Number of pre-assessment telephone calls	30	43
Number of households that proceeded to the full assessment	15 (50% of the total)	25 (58% of the total)

Table 8.2. Targets and actual achievements in the Identify mechanism.

The full assessment

Process

The full assessments were undertaken at the property and consisted of fully explaining the 3SR process, including the challenges that it presents for households, and recording comprehensive information based on conversations with the homeowners and observations of the property. The information was recorded in a form that was based on the one previously used by Enerterre and was used to plan the implementation of the 3SR projects at each household. The visits lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours and included the following information:

1. The renovation work already done.
2. The renovation work still needed.
3. The renovation work feasible within 3SR.
4. What the owner wanted to do alone, with volunteers, and with professional craftsmen.
5. The budget of the householder.
6. The availability of the householder, the ideal schedule for the work and the maximum schedule for the work.
7. The constraints of the householder, such as work commitments, children and other caring responsibilities.
8. Where the household would live during the renovation work.
9. The safety of the work site, especially for volunteers.
10. The psychological/emotional readiness of the household to undertake a challenging 3SR process.

Challenges and outcomes

As would be expected, the task of arranging and conducting 25 home visits of up to two hours each was very time-consuming. This challenge was amplified by the rural nature of the area, which necessitated round trips of up to three hours to visit households. Nonetheless, these were completed.



A 3SR worksite.

5. Alleviate: the 3SR process (EO4.1)

Process

The process of planning, scheduling and implementation of 3SR projects is inherently complicated and challenging because it has to take into account:

- The availability of:
 - The homeowner
 - Finance from the homeowner
 - Alternative accommodation for the homeowner
 - Volunteers
 - The appropriate professional tradespeople (with appropriate accreditations) who are willing to work in more formal ways (rather than informal or – as Les 7 vents put it – ‘invisible’ ways).
 - The necessary materials and tools
- The need to conduct some renovation tasks during the spring and summer. This is to allow sufficient time for some of the materials (e.g. lime) to cure and set before the adverse weather of the winter months.

- Complicated arrangements for contracts (which had to be based on very accurate cost estimates) and insurance for all participants (homeowners, tradespeople and volunteers).

These issues are discussed further below, from the perspective of the householders. Les 7 Vents reflected that the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the ensuing rises in energy prices, and generally high inflation, made this process even more challenging. This was due to the impact of rising energy costs on the homeowner, making 3SR both more necessary and less affordable; the increased price and reduced availability of materials; the rising costs of professional labour; and the lower availability of volunteers (who needed to do more paid work). In addition, Les 7 Vents found that some of the professional tradespeople were already very busy with Enerterre 3SR projects and were less willing to work with Les 7 Vents because it was a new organisation in the 3SR space.

Outcomes

As shown in Table 7.3, a total of five 3SR projects were implemented and completed during the CEES project. Four 3SR project worksites were implemented and completed in the first half of 2023 (these were all renovation projects that had been already started by the householder and were continued in 3SR). A further project worksite was implemented in the first half of 2024. Table 7.3 shows that, while the target was to complete nine 3SR projects, only five could be completed. Les 7 Vents reported that this was largely due to the availability of professional tradespeople, often because they were already working on Enerterre 3SR projects. As a result of this challenge, Les 7 Vents realised that there is insufficient capacity among the local tradespeople to support 3SR projects by both Enerterre and Les 7 Vents. Therefore, the decision was taken for Les 7 Vents in future to revert to its earlier role of referring households to Enerterre for 3SR.

	Target	Actual
Full assessments completed and entering the planning and scheduling phase	15	25
3SR projects implemented and completed in CEES	9 (60% of the full assessments)	5 (4 in 2023 and 1 in 2024) (25% of the full assessments)

Table 7.3. Targets and actual achievements in the Alleviate mechanism.



6. Alleviate: household experiences and impacts (EO4.2)

Introduction

As a renovation project, 3SR is very different from the other Alleviate mechanisms that were implemented in the CEES pilots (these tended to focus on energy advice and smaller measures). A key difference between these two types of project is that the number of participants in renovation projects is likely to be a relatively small, while the numbers of household participants in most of the other pilots was much greater.

Turning to evaluation, the key implication of this is that the surveys developed for the evaluation methodology for CEES were less suitable, as this method relies on getting a reasonable sized sample for statistical testing. For this reason, the 3SR project manager instead implemented an informal interview with each of the four participating households whose worksite was completed in 2023. The informal interviews took place in October 2023. The interviews followed a consistent topic guide/protocol (this can be seen in Appendix 1) and householders' comments were recorded by taking notes. The householders' consent was secured for their comments to be reported anonymously in CEES outputs.

About the households

The households had a range of demographic characteristics. One household was a young couple. Notably, two of the households were single woman households, one aged around 40 and the other aged around 60. The fourth project was a little different. The purpose of the project was to build an energy efficient strawbale house for an elderly couple with health problems. This project was managed and implemented through 3SR by the sons and daughter of the elderly couple.

Although the households were different in these ways, they were also similar in several respects. For instance, they all had previous experience of volunteering in 3SR-type projects; thus, they knew what to expect to some extent and already had some valuable skills and knowledge. The households were also similar in that they had already started their self-renovation project before joining the Les 7 Vents 3SR programme. Indeed, one of the houses had been renovated in stages since as long ago as 2003 and only became habitable in 2013. It is important to note that, in most cases, the 2023 3SR worksite was just the latest stage of the renovation and there will be more stages in the future.

Finally, while all of the households were motivated by the financial advantages of 3SR (both during and after the renovation), they were also strongly motivated by the participatory ethos of 3SR, which they variously expressed as sharing, mutual aid, community, human exchange, cooperation and participation. Encapsulating these motivations, one of the women stated, *'People are my fuel'* and continued, *'Participatory renovation projects also participate in the renovation of people'*.

The situation prior to the renovation

Not surprisingly, the three households that were renovating their current homes revealed that their properties were very energy inefficient prior to their renovation. One of the householders spoke of single skin walls, single glazing and no insulation; another of large rooms that were impossible to heat. Households described inadequate heating systems, living in cold conditions, living in one room and cooking just once or twice a week. One of the women described living in 'isolation, with the shutters closed', due to the conditions in her home (there were also additional reasons for this), while the young couple spoke of limiting their social interactions at home.

Preparing for 3SR

Where to live during the renovation?

Three of the four participants needed to decide whether to live in the property that was being renovated or to try to live elsewhere during the renovation⁷. Both of these options bring challenges. The younger woman had to move several times and lived in a caravan, a friend's house and in the property that was being renovated. For their part, the young couple lived in the house while it was being renovated. The older woman also lived in the property that was being renovated. She commented that it was very challenging to clear the rooms that were being worked on.

Planning and co-ordinating the work

One of the householders stated that they did not have any problems planning and co-ordinating the renovation work, noting that they are very organised. The other households noted a number of challenges.

In terms of finding and making the arrangements with volunteers, one of the householders observed that they initially felt uncomfortable seeking this kind of support. Another noted that finding volunteers was challenging until, through Les 7 Vents, they were able to draw on Enerterre's network of volunteers. The young couple also commented on the challenge of finding volunteers within the context of changing plans and a winter worksite:

'We changed the date several times and we were able to set the date one week before. So it wasn't easy to find people available during the week, and maybe also at this time in December. Inevitably, this has an impact on the mobilisation of the volunteer network.'

Several of the householders commented positively on the role of Les 7 Vents in planning and co-ordinating the various aspects of the renovation (professionals, volunteers, materials etc). One of the householders made the following highly positive comments:

⁷ The fourth project was a new build so everyone was able to live in their existing homes during the project.

'Given the scale of the project, managing to get volunteers was complicated, I had put ads on Twiza [this is a French eco-building network] and I only had one person, the impact of your communication with the network of the Enerterre association was a real plus, we received a lot of requests thanks to your network.'

'I had confidence, I felt safe after meeting Les 7 Vents, then the professionals who came to make the estimate. You were able to actively listen, not judge, and propose solutions that took into account what I really wanted, and you've taken the land into account. It's an accompaniment in the planning. It's really about cooperation, communication and kindness, so I trusted you. '

Experiences of 3SR worksites

Overall perspectives

The four households were united in describing their experiences of 3SR as rewarding but also challenging in some ways. One of the participants acknowledged that they had expected the experience to be worse than it actually was:

'Before I had a construction site at home, I imagined it would be worse than it actually was, it was a pleasant surprise. It's good, it's an enriching experience, but tiring. Being a handyman is important, and not being a perfectionist, you have to accept imperfections, challenges. It's the adventure, the construction site.'

The role of the professional craftsmen

The householders typically responded very well to the professional craftspeople, commenting positively on the teaching that the professionals provided as well as the ways in which they engaged with the volunteers:

'The craftsmen who came to supervise were very good in terms of pedagogy, they give tasks which we feel able to do, and we can leave the very technical tasks to them.'

'She was very technically proficient, she is both flexible and firm, clear, without abusing power. She is human, simple and generous. It's a real accompaniment, the best! She has a knack for not making you feel like you're rubbish. She makes sure not to leave the volunteers in the wrong. It's comfortable for everyone, and it's full of conviviality.'

'Brilliant, very competent, self-assured, clear, gives time to each volunteer, knows how to manage his group well, brings friendliness and technicality. We couldn't have asked for anything better.'

At the same time one of the households commented that it can sometimes be difficult to follow the instructions of the professional and another noted the challenges of getting everything ready for when the professional would be on site:

'The craftsman trained us, and then we had to be able to train the volunteers. It's true that he explains quickly, without being precise, it's not always easy to understand all the steps when you don't know the technique.'

'The professional was there for 15-day sessions, everything had to be ready each time, we had disappointments and so we were delayed several times and it was up to us to make sure that nothing was missing so that the volunteers only had to "do", It involved a lot of fatigue.'

Les 7 Vents also reported the view that the tradespeople were sometimes not very adept at communicating with householders and volunteers. At the same time, Les 7 Vents reported that the tradespeople themselves were sometimes frustrated by what they saw as the lack of preparation by the householders, prior to their arrival on site, and unrealistic expectations on the part of volunteers about the realities of a 3SR worksite project. It is clear that the role of the professional tradespeople is challenging to get right.

The role of the volunteers

The householders all spoke very warmly and positively of the contributions of the volunteers. In particular, it is clear that the volunteers enable labour-intensive tasks to be completed much more quickly than would be possible otherwise. Householders also spoke positively of the strong sense of community that was created and experienced by everyone involved. Not surprisingly, the householders also described challenges working with volunteers

'It was a joy to see that people cared about me, that they came to help me. To see my house alive, to hear noises, voices, positives, laughter, to see the work progressing so easily. To discover new people, people who sometimes live right next door. It moves me. I'm finally taken care of, it feeds a part of you, life gives you a gift of care.'

'These projects are labour-intensive and lend themselves well to welcoming volunteers. Our project is a solidarity project, my brothers and sisters are already participating and having the support of volunteers is very enriching and gives balm to the heart when we see the progress after each day in the participatory worksite.'

'What was difficult was letting strangers into my home. I'm hoarding, I'm living in boxes, my deceased parents' stuff is still here. It's difficult to welcome people in these conditions. I've always taken care of people other than myself and now I'm being taken care of.'

'The investment for food, I didn't look at the expense, and the time to prepare, I wanted to offer a good hearty meal to the volunteers and it's still a cost that we don't really anticipate.'



'It's time-consuming to welcome volunteers, each time one arrives. I thought it would be faster with a group of volunteers, I thought we would have done more m². As for the atmosphere, I imagined it would be friendly, and it was great!'

Impacts of 3SR

As was noted above, the householder interviews were conducted by Les 7 Vents in October 2023, just a few months after the 3SR worksite and before the winter of 2023-2024. In addition, it is important to remember that, in some cases, future phases of renovation were still to come. Nonetheless, the householders described impacts from the 3SR projects relating to learning and to improvements in their economic situation:

'I am tired but happy, I learned a lot on my construction site. '

'An economic gain for sure, mutual aid helped me a lot.'

7. Legacy of the CEES pilot for Les 7 Vents (EO6)

Fund

1. Les 7 Vents now has a track record of work on energy poverty alleviation. This has already resulted Les 7 Vents successfully securing a grant of up to €210,000 and places Les 7 Vents in a good position to apply for further grants to work on energy poverty alleviation in the future.
2. Les 7 Vents has learned a lot about the challenges of setting up microdonations schemes with local builders' merchants and DIY stores, and with builders and tradespeople.
3. On the basis of this experience and the Fund section in the CEES Energy Solidarity Toolkit, Les 7 Vents has now developed a new funding diversification strategy. This will focus on two activities: setting up a microdonations scheme in which householders can add a microdonation to their bill for building services and securing Corporate Social Responsibility donations from local businesses to support Enterterre's 3SR work.

Identify

1. During the course of the CEES 3SR project that Les 7 Vents ran, and its participation in CEES, Les 7 Vents has learned a great deal about identifying and recruiting people in energy poverty. This knowledge will be very useful in the context of its new grant funded project on energy poverty alleviation.



Alleviate

1. As a direct result of the CEES project, the new grant of up to €210,000 that Les 7 Vents has secured will support in-depth work on energy poverty alleviation with 30 households over three years.

8. Key learning from the Les 7 Vents pilot

Fund

1. In the absence of energy customers, it is very challenging to set up a microdonations scheme; for instance, with builders' merchants and DIY (do it yourself) stores. Key challenges include mismatches between local objectives and national chains, the upfront work and costs for the companies and becoming an entity that can accept donations.
2. Once an organisation starts to work on energy poverty alleviation, it can relatively quickly establish a track record, opening up the possibility of securing grant funding for such work.

Identify

1. Partnerships with other groups (in this case, the Les 7 Vents energy advisors) to identify people in energy poverty and to refer them to energy solidarity projects are very helpful. At the same time, such partnerships can be challenging to set up, particularly with respect to consistently referring the right kinds of households. In addition, the Les 7 Vents pilot illustrates that it is important to engage with other internal teams earlier in the process of applying for funding that will create new tasks for those teams.

Alleviate

1. The 3SR approach offers the potential to reduce renovation costs and future energy costs for householders.
2. Further, the 3SR approach brings valuable learning opportunities for householders and volunteers, and can bring a powerful sense of partnership, community and collaboration for all participants.
3. At the same time, renovation projects such as 3SR, are challenging to set up and implement. This is the case for the organisation that is co-ordinating the work, for the householders, for the professional tradespeople and for the volunteers. Key challenges include making sure that all the personnel and the materials are all in the right place at the right time (particularly the professional tradespeople) and administrative issues such as contracts and insurance.

4. The Les 7 Vents 3SR pilot shows that the capacity for such projects in a particular locale can be limited by the capacity and availability of the local tradespeople.

