EMPOWERING ZERO-EMISSION CITIZENS

Aarhus University Solar Cooperative

Pioneering Citizen Science Project tackles Climate Change

Project Aurora is pioneering the development of University Energy Communities dedicated to supporting members to reduce not only their own carbon footprints through practical action, but that of the universities where they study and work.

Aarhus University is leading the way, establishing a Solar Cooperative Universitetets Energifællesskab F.M.B.A (UEF) and then negotiating an agreement with the University Authorities and the University Building Owner to install and operate rooftop solar panels to supply energy to the University. The cost is met by financing raised through crowdfunding, allowing university students and staff to invest in and financially benefit from the energy transition. The scheme delivers power for the university at competitive rates, displaces fossil fuels from the university energy supply contracts and illustrates a model other universities can follow.

“Our students at Aarhus University want to be part of the energy transition but for them, it is difficult because they do not have large savings or own a house in which to put the solar panels. This project allows them to be co-owners of the solar panels and that triggers a lot of enthusiasm and reflections on their energy consumption” says Marta Victoria, Associate Professor at Aarhus University.

The AURORA project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101036418

The project's installed capacity is 98 kW in total on two rooftops within the University buildings. Two different types of solar panels (bifacial and monofacial, one on each rooftop) were chosen for the installation so students and researchers could compare their performance in Danish weather. The installation adopts an east-west orientation in a delta structure and ballast system for mounting.

Linked to the AURORA Energy Tracker app, investors will shortly be able to see how much energy is being generated and offset the carbon saved from their investment against their own carbon footprint. They can use a unique labelling scheme to see how effectively they play their part to get to net zero in line with EU targets.

In addition, the renewable energy scheme is being linked to the university's teaching curriculum, empowering a new generation of students to tackle climate change as they graduate and enter the working community.

Quote from project communications lead, Martin Brocklehurst: "With over 5000 higher education institutes in Europe, we want to empower the 17.5 million students, 1.35 million educators and 1.17 million researchers in Europe to get involved and replicate our approach, not only in their own universities but in the towns and cities that surround them".

More information on AURORA project:
https://www.aurora-h2020.eu/
https://www.aurora-h2020.eu/aurora/ourapp/

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Notes for editors:

Empowering Citizen Science to tackle climate change: The AURORA Project

Launched in December 2021 under the European 'Green Deal' initiative, Project AURORA ("Achieving a New European Energy Awareness") is at the forefront of empowering citizens to transform the energy sector actively. Funded by the EU's Horizon 2020 programme with an investment of €4.6 million, AURORA aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 50% within the next decade, moving Europe towards becoming the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

Project AURORA has developed techniques to engage citizens, students, academics and researchers in the energy transition. The project has a range of business models, in addition to the one used at Aarhus University, that reduce energy costs, lower carbon emissions, and deliver a return on personal capital invested. In Portugal, for instance, the project is working with the Red Cross to show that everyone in society can benefit from innovative interventions. In the United Kingdom, work is underway with the Forest of Dean District Council with the same aim. The project demonstrates that a citizen science approach can be led from within universities and municipalities, across cultures, and socio-economic groups. Universities, academic institutions and municipalities can potentially be key drivers of the energy transition across Europe.

Up to 30% of all carbon emissions arise from the way we heat and power our homes and the transport choices we all make. Changes in our behaviour can make a difference**. It is easy to protest about climate change, but this is a focused way to take practical action and give a brighter future for the children of tomorrow.**

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AURORA

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It's time to take action and do things differently

SIGN UP TODAY!

Project AURORA has developed a range of tools and techniques people can use to measure their energy use, drive down their carbon emissions and make a real difference. The scheme has pioneered a simple labelling system so you can see how you compare to citizens across Europe and track your progress through a simple app on your mobile phone.

Interested parties can Join Project AURORA as an Ambassadors for Change.

With over 500 million citizens living and working in the EU and the UK, citizens can drive this change without waiting for Governments to act.

Further information:

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Project coordinator at Aarhus University, Zhe Zhang zhe@mpe.au.dk or +45 6056 5479

This innovative project has established five demonstration sites in Denmark, England, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain, collectively reducing the carbon footprint of 7,000 citizens. These sites are focused on harnessing leading-edge photovoltaic technology and fostering local energy communities where citizens become both producers and consumers of energy ('prosumers'). Through this approach, AURORA is making the energy system more transparent, fair, and sustainable.

Citizen Science at the core of AURORA

Citizen science plays a pivotal role in AURORA, involving citizens directly in scientific endeavours that generate new knowledge and understanding about energy consumption and production. Participants in these projects act as contributors, collaborators, or even project leaders, engaging in activities from data collection to analysis and dissemination of results. This hands-on involvement helps demystify the climate crisis by making individuals aware of their 'carbon footprints' and providing tailored recommendations to improve energy decisions.

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AURORA's approach is explicitly citizen-led, contrasting with top-down strategies and political statements, such as those seen at the recent government summit in Glasgow (COP26). The project coordinator from the Technical University of Madrid, Dr Ana Belén Cristóbal López, emphasises, " It is people who make the difference in climate change, particularly the poorest in our society, who stand to gain most from reducing their carbon emissions."

Project expansion and community engagement

The project is ready to expand its reach through Ambassadors across Europe, aiming to ignite a bottom-up movement for change. AURORA engages with university management, municipalities, and policymakers across the UK and Europe, advocating for a more citizen-driven approach to climate crisis solutions. The project consortium includes nine institutions from six countries, demonstrating a robust collaborative network.

Visit our website or contact our team to learn about citizen science and AURORA's transformative strategies. We are dedicated to democratising energy governance and empowering citizens to make sustainable energy decisions.

The AURORA project consortium:

- Technical University of Madrid, Spain (Project Coordinator)
- Aarhus University, Denmark
- Centre for Sustainable Energy, United Kingdom
- Forest of Dean District Council, United Kingdom
- Institute for Science & Innovation Communication, Germany
- KempleyGreen Consultants, United Kingdom
- Qualifying Photovoltaics, Spain
- University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
- University of Évora, Portugal

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