



Ecopower cvba

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Samen investeren in hernieuwbare energie

Project author or developer:
RESCOOP ECOPOWER

Where:
BE / Belgium / Antwerp

Website:
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Ecopower - renewable energy across Belgium Cooperatives have a long history in the energy market. In the 1930s, Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal encouraged the formation of electric cooperatives that brought electricity to many parts of the rural United States considered unprofitable by private power companies. With today's growing focus on clean and sustainable energy sources, renewable energy cooperatives are a booming sector. One success story is Ecopower, a Belgian cooperative that funds renewable energy projects, giving every citizen the chance to invest in the production of renewable energy and rational energy use. Funds are collected from as many members as possible (the cooperative currently has 40,000), and mainly invested in self-developed projects, like power plants running on vegetable oil or wind turbines. Ecopower also supplies 1.1% of households in Flanders with green energy. Shareholders can buy shares for €250 each, and each shareholder receives a vote in the cooperative's General Meeting. Profit for shareholders is limited to 6%, because of its cooperative status, but this means that the financial surplus can be used to fund less-profitable projects. Ecopower is growing, but it is trying to grow in a controlled way, with a goal of maximizing the added value it can bring to society rather than simple profits. Ecopower also invests in projects developed by others, like local initiative groups, local cooperatives, local authorities and private companies. Actively supporting other renewable energy cooperatives is an important element of Ecopower's philosophy, and it is a member of REScoops.eu, the European federation of groups and cooperatives of citizens for renewable energy founded in March 2011. "Since everyone needs energy and the wind, the sun and water are common goods, renewable energy cooperatives are the most sensible way of organizing everyone's provision," says Dirk Vansintjan, a member of the board of directors. Raising awareness about renewable energy is also key. When Ecopower won the right to build and operate wind turbines on sites around the city of Eeklo, near Ghent, as part of a city council project, it ran an information campaign together with the city. As a result, the citizens of Eeklo were well-informed about the project, and many ended up purchasing shares in Ecopower, giving them shared ownership of what they came to think of as "their" wind turbines. Promoting rational energy use is also important to Ecopower. "Every kWh not spent is the greenest kWh," says Vansintjan. In the future, he says, Ecopower wants renewable energy cooperatives to participate in every wind project in Belgium, "in order to secure the supply of renewable energy to households at an affordable and fair price."

