



FACTSHEET

Energy measures at home: affecting family decision-making

MVI-Energy

Since 2013, as part of the Innovation program MVI-Energy twenty research projects have started to generate knowledge about societal issues related to the energy transition. This research project handles the question how decision-making processes with regard to energy savings take place within families.

Cause and background

The Netherlands has a housing stock of 3.5 million privately owned homes. Most of those homes have a high energy usage. It is difficult to persuade homeowners towards a decision to invest in energy saving measures or renewable energy measures (hereafter: energy measures). This is due to policy instruments' narrow focus on energy measures (instead of combining these with residential preferences of people), envisaging homeowners as single decision-makers (while many decisions take place as a family) and ignoring the life stages of homeowners. In short, the living experience of families is often overlooked, while research teaches us that people perceive domestic energy-related retrofit in terms of comfort and homeliness instead of saving energy (Judson et al 2014; Wilson et al 2015).

House and home

Research into living experience has shown that the domestic environment should be seen as an expression of the identity of those who make themselves at home there (Mallet 2004; Karjalainen 1993). Moreover, house and home are not the same. A house is a physical structure, while a home is a feeling enacted by residents through all kinds of practices: through furnishing the rooms, undertaking everyday household tasks, maintaining the house and engaging with relatives indoors and neighbours outdoors. As such, families do not so much maintain and improve their house, rather they make themselves at home continuously and actively. Energy consumption plays a role in that process (Aune 2007). The question is how?

Furthermore, residents do not distinguish between a choice for energy measures and other domestic retrofit measures. Rather, they see domestic retrofit as a long-term process, with sometimes a large interval between individual energy measures, for instance cavity wall insulation and floor insulation (Van Hal et al 2010; Bartiaux et al 2013).

Central research question

How can (existing) approaches that stimulate families to choose for energy saving measures within their home link more closely to the living experience of families and their decision-making dynamics with regard to domestic retrofit measures?

Period

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March 2019

Status

In progress

Research partners

Alliander
Buurkracht
Hoom
Wageningen University
Nyenrode Business University

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Project leader

Remko Cremers (Alliander)

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Family and gender

With regard to living experience, research has shown that residents feel at home in gender-specific ways (Gram-Hanssen & Bech-Danielsen 2004; Tjorring 2016). Both women and men find comfort essential, but women attach great importance to aesthetic aspects while men attach importance to technological aspects. Furthermore, in general women identify more with their neighbours and value social engagement in the neighbourhood. This can potentially trickle down into the decision-making process with regard to domestic retrofit measures. Thus, women and men will enrol differently in decision-making processes when it concerns their home. This raises the question how, as a family, people come to those decisions? Nowadays, as part of the ongoing process of women's and emancipation we can speak of an ongoing democratization within the family (Duyvendak & Stavenuiter 2006). Men are no longer considered to be

the head of the family and the person that makes decisions on behalf of the family. Research has shown that women often take the lead when it comes to buying domestic products (Familie Kenniscentrum 2011). Moreover, children are gaining a voice in family decisions. In general, as children grow older their influence on decisions affecting the family grows as well (Bronner 2003; Martensen & Gronholdt 2008).

The ongoing democratization within families ensures that, increasingly, decisions are the result of joint consultation by all family members. In doing so, the family has developed into a decision-making unit. Present-day approaches, called 'customer journeys', which are designed to affect decision-making with regard to energy saving neglect this family complexity: the family is seen as a 1-person decision-maker, while most privately owned homes are inhabited by 2 or more persons in different family configurations. Therefore, thinking in terms of a 'family journey' is more appropriate.

By linking the relationship between the living experience of families in general and women in particular to the decision-making dynamics within families, this research project aims to unfold what role women play in a family journey towards domestic (energy-led) retrofit measures. We ask how women make decisions about energy measures from their living experience, but also vice versa how decisions made by women from their living experience can be linked to possible energy measures. For instance, some energy measures have additional benefits to family's living experience; heating on the basis of heat pumps is often combined with underfloor heating and panel heating. This means that radiators can be removed, there are more options to (re)decorate the house and there is less dust at home. Another example is insulation of the exterior façade of the house which often leads to broad, 'cosy' windowsills.

Stages of life

Finally, the stages of life of families are of influence on the decision-making with respect to energy measures at home (Judson & Maller 2014). A family expecting a baby will take into account different considerations than a family with older children or no children at all.

Aim of the research project

This research project aims to provide insight into the living experience of families in general, women in particular and the decision-making dynamics within families with regard to domestic retrofit measures.

This leads to the following research questions: How does decision-making about domestic retrofit measures emerge within families in different stages of life, and what role does the living experience of families in general and women in particular play in this process? How does energy play a role in the living experience of

families and in their decision-making with regard to domestic? How can (existing) approaches that stimulate families to choose for energy saving measures within their home link more closely to the living experience of families and their decision-making dynamics with regard to domestic retrofit measures?

Results

The research project will result in knowledge elements in the form of factsheets publicly available to all and a number of 'practical approaches for affecting family decision-making at home' which will provide the Dutch building and insulation sector with relevant insights and techniques for influencing the family decision-making dynamics at different stages of life as regard to domestic energy measures. The point of focus will be the role of women and children in this decision-making process.



Figuur 1: Een gezin kent meerdere beslissers t.a.v. woonbeleving en energiemaatregelen

Practical implementation

To ensure social and practical valorization of research results, different partners cooperate in this research project. Hoom and Buurkracht supply practical knowledge and propose families as potential respondents. Wageningen University and Nyenrode University share their research expertise and contribute to the academic quality and scientific assessment of the project. A consultative committee of social partners (e.g. VNG, Dutch Green Building Council, Vrouwen van Nu) ensures social and practical relevance and a wide dissemination of research results.

More information

Want to know more about family decision-making as regard to energy saving measures? Go to topsectorenergie.nl/maatschappelijk-verantwoord-innoveren-energie/documenten or contact Mandy de Wilde of Wageningen University via mandy.dewilde@wur.nl or Remko Cremers van Alliander via remko.cremers@alliander.com of 06-54.366.965.

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