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This manuscript has been previously reviewed at another Nature Portfolio journal. This document only contains reviewer comments and rebuttal letters for versions considered at Communications Earth & Environment.

Web links to the author's journal account have been redacted from the decision letters as indicated to maintain confidentiality.

30th Jun 23

Dear Professor Sovacool,

Your revised manuscript titled "Harnessing social innovation for inclusive and accelerated energy transitions" has now been seen by the three original reviewers who assessed the paper for another Nature Portfolio journal, and I include their comments below. In light of their advice we are delighted to say that we are happy, in principle, to publish a suitably revised version in Communications Earth & Environment, provided you can strengthen the discussion of your findings in the context of the existing literature and clarify your contribution by linking the discussion more directly to your data, as requested by reviewers 1 and 2. If appropriate, we will publish your manuscript under the open access CC BY license (Creative Commons Attribution v4.0 International License).

We invite you to revise your paper one last time to address all the remaining concerns of our reviewers. In particular, please ensure that your methodology is transparent, to a level that will allow independent researchers to reproduce your results.

At the same time we ask that you edit your manuscript to comply with our format requirements and to maximise the accessibility and therefore the impact of your work.

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We hope to hear from you within two weeks; please let us know if you need more time.

Best regards,

Heike Langenberg, PhD
Chief Editor
Communications Earth & Environment

On Twitter: @CommsEarth

REVIEWERS' COMMENTS:

Reviewer #1 (Remarks to the Author):

Dear authors, thank you for the radical transition (sic) of your manuscript!

Despite the substantial and relevant modifications, which I really welcome, I have still some comments, which, however, can be tackled easily.

First: triangulation. Triangulation is not a panacea. Triangulation is not, as it is said now, a must. Papers without triangulation can be very reliable. Furthermore, triangulation does not guarantee high quality and reliability. So I ask the authors to explain how and where triangulation improved quality and reliability of the findings in a more specific way. Everyone knows that during these kinds of projects researchers tend to do their own thing and at the end the poor project leader has to put together everything. It is always a creative construction but not always triangulation.

Second: robustness. It is said that the study is robust. I think it is to the reader, referee and editor to assess and judge. Maybe I missed something but then the authors should explain better why this is a robust study, or just not mentioning the word.

Third: captions. Often the authors mention 'authors' as a source; for me that is not common, but it is up to the editor to deal with it.

Fourth: national context. The impact of national context is mentioned, as well as some examples, but it would be nice if authors can, based on their huge empirical material, discuss some important and

interesting examples of this impact and what it means for the transforming capacity of social innovation initiatives.

Fifth: added value and critical distance. I think this paper has additional value compared to earlier synthesising papers on social innovation projects. I think the most important added value concerns its methodology and concepts. I would emphasise this. The other 3 key findings - as mentioned in the abstract - are less strong. I ask the authors to discuss their findings more critically in the light of other literature, on the role of markets, governance, networks, transformative potential, and the acceptance of social innovation initiatives by citizens. For instance, in several countries, energy cooperatives are not growing anymore or even declining, and lack support from government and citizens. In several countries opposing and competitive types of citizens-led 'social innovation' initiatives can be found. Many papers are available about this, and I think the authors know them. Adding more reflection and a more critical discussion to the paper will make the paper a - even - more mature scientific paper and - even - less a interesting summary of a project.

Reviewer #2 (Remarks to the Author):

Very significant changes have been made from the previous version, and this was necessary.

I would suggest a stronger link between the conclusions and the data presented in the discussion. For example, it would be useful to indicate specific countries in the summary (list which group of countries who belongs to). It is not clear what data proves the very high (90%) acceptance of RES investments.

I think that the description of the section "A1.5 Citizen survey" could be improved. E.g. it is not clear what the sample distribution was for three countries: in France, Germany and Poland. There are only data for all survey techniques. What variables were controlled in the rektutation. We don't know when and how the data was collected.

In fact, this part of the project is so rich in data that one could build a narrative around survey data alone.

I think there should be a list of mapped SIE initiatives in the appendix. Whereas Table A3: List of country reports and case study reports could be included as an appendix.

Reviewer #3 (Remarks to the Author):

Thank you for addressing the comments. The paper has improved considerably.

very minor comment: I just spotted this paper should be referenced as "Lupi et al"

"Lupi writes that
social innovation in the form of collective action initiatives have served to raise
environmental awareness, promoted the mobilization of citizens, and fostered social

inclusion.19"

Authors response is in red italicized text.

Reviewer #1 (Remarks to the Author):

Dear authors, thank you for the radical transition (sic) of your manuscript!

Despite the substantial and relevant modifications, which I really welcome, I have still some comments, which, however, can be tackled easily.

Thank you, we appreciate these final suggestions.

First: triangulation. Triangulation is not a panacea. Triangulation is not, as it is said now, a must. Papers without triangulation can be very reliable. Furthermore, triangulation does not guarantee high quality and reliability. So I ask the authors to explain how and where triangulation improved quality and reliability of the findings in a more specific way. Everyone knows that during these kinds of projects researchers tend to do their own thing and at the end the poor project leader has to put together everything. It is always a creative construction but not always triangulation.

We've removed the text about the positive nature of triangulation from the abstract and research methods section. We've kept only one sentence mentioning it and it does so as a matter of fact, not any sort of normative statement about its value (or lack thereof).

Second: robustness. It is said that the study is robust. I think it is to the reader, referee and editor to assess and judge. Maybe I missed something but then the authors should explain better why this is a robust study, or just not mentioning the word.

We agreed, we've removed the word "robust".

Third: captions. Often the authors mention 'authors' as a source; for me that is not common, but it is up to the editor to deal with it.

It's necessary to distinguish figures/tables that are our own, rather than from another source.

Fourth: national context. The impact of national context is mentioned, as well as some examples, but it would be nice if authors can, based on their huge empirical material, discuss some important and interesting examples of this impact and what it means for the transforming capacity of social innovation initiatives.

We have added a few extra lines to this effect in the Conclusion.

Fifth: added value and critical distance. I think this paper has additional value compared to earlier synthesising papers on social innovation projects. I think the most important added value concerns its methodology and concepts. I would emphasise this. The other 3 key findings - as mentioned in the abstract - are less strong. I ask the authors to discuss their findings more critically in the light of other literature, on the role of markets, governance, networks, transformative potential, and the acceptance of social innovation initiatives by citizens. For instance, in several countries, energy cooperatives are not growing anymore or even declining, and lack support from government and citizens. In several countries opposing and competitive types of citizens-led 'social innovation' initiatives can be found. Many papers are available about this, and I think the authors know them. Adding more reflection and a more critical discussion to the paper will make the paper a - even - more mature scientific paper and - even - less a interesting summary of a project.

We agree with the reviewer that some (energy) policy changes have been detrimental to some social innovation fields, such as energy cooperatives. We also observed that new energy and climate policy proposals do not sufficiently take into account their relevance for acting as driver or barrier to social innovation. We have added a recent reference explaining that policies such as

the EU's fit for 55 package are not yet fit for social innovation, and if changed could better harness its transformative potential. This was part of the ongoing research within SONNET, but to not overburden the article, was not included here.

Reviewer #2 (Remarks to the Author):

Very significant changes have been made from the previous version, and this was necessary.

I would suggest a stronger link between the conclusions and the data presented in the discussion. For example, it would be useful to indicate specific countries in the summary (list which group of countries who belongs to). It is not clear what data proves the very high (90%) acceptance of RES investments.

In Section 3.4, we refer to the findings regarding the high shares of participants who are potentially willing to invest in renewable energy communities. We added wording to clarify that these percentages pertain specifically to the projects presented in the experiments. To provide accurate attribution, we make reference to the relevant report, D5.4, from which these figures were sourced, as opposed to A1.5.

I think that the description of the section "A1.5 Citizen survey" could be improved. E.g. it is not clear what the sample distribution was for three countries: in France, Germany and Poland. There are only data for all survey techniques. What variables were controlled in the rektutation. We don't know when and how the data was collected.

In A1, we document how our sample data was collected. For example, we explain that the survey data was collected online during July and August 2021, provide descriptive statistics for the samples and national statistics in France, Germany, and Poland in Table A4, report information on median response time and measures undertaken for quality control. Reporting all variables used in the different types of statistical-econometric analyses would be beyond the scope of this paper. For further details, we now refer in A1 to the respective reports and publication

In fact, this part of the project is so rich in data that one could build a narrative around survey data alone.

I think there should be a list of mapped SIE initiatives in the appendix. Whereas Table A3: List of country reports and case study reports could be included as an appendix.

We have included a link to the data for the 500 initiatives (as an Excel file) which we share on the platform zenodo:

<https://zenodo.org/record/6580925>

<https://zenodo.org/badge/DOI/10.5281/zenodo.6580925.svg>

Reviewer #3 (Remarks to the Author):

Thank you for addressing the comments. The paper has improved considerably.

Excellent, glad to hear it.

very minor comment: I just spotted this paper should be referenced as "Lupi et al"

"Lupi writes that

social innovation in the form of collective action initiatives have served to raise environmental awareness, promoted the mobilization of citizens, and fostered social inclusion.¹⁹"

Good catch, this has been corrected.