

Local energy advice centres in France: quite active but how effective? An evaluation of local energy actions in France

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Abstract

In 2001, ADEME, the French Environmental and Energy Management Agency, launched the nationwide network of local energy advice centres called Espace Info Energie or EIE. Today, the EIE network has 187 centres and 340 energy advisers.

According to their charter, EIEs have two assigned missions:

- to provide free and neutral individual advice to the general public, organisations and small companies;
- to carry out outreach and information activities, by holding conferences and workshops, organising on-site visits, participating in fairs and exhibitions, etc.

The paper focuses more strongly on the activities carried out in the scope of the second mission between 2004 and 2005 in three regions of France. The evaluation is based on a quantitative and qualitative assessment which concerned 1 610 actions. The quantitative assessment presents the distribution between the type of actions, the nature and number of the targeted population, treated themes, etc. The qualitative evaluation aims at assessing the beneficiaries' knowledge and involvement in energy efficiency and renewable energy before and after the action, EIEs' notoriety and image among the public, the level of satisfaction and the impact of the services delivered. Around 500 beneficiaries were interviewed on-site and through telephone surveys.

The paper will discuss the evaluation results in particular in terms of the EIEs image, the number of individuals reached and actual investments realised. Finally, it will highlight possible areas of improvement: which themes and actions should be reinforced, which public has been neglected, how to strengthen the public's motivation to act and invest.

Context and objectives of the assessment

CONTEXT

The oil crisis in September 2000 led to a reinforcement of energy conservation policies. The French Government presented in December 2000 a National Program for the Improvement of Energy Efficiency in which the creation of local energy information centres was a key measure. In 2001, ADEME, the French Environmental and Energy Management Agency, launched the nationwide network of local energy advice centres called Espace Info Energie or EIE.

According to their charter, EIEs have two assigned and distinct missions:

- to provide free and independent individualized advice to the general public, organisations and small companies: we will refer to this mission in the text as "individualized energy advice";
- to carry out outreach and information activities, by holding conferences, leading working-groups, organising on-site visits, participating in fairs and exhibitions, etc.: these activities are grouped under the generic term "outreach actions".

Much like in the United Kingdom, ADEME chose, to set up the energy advice centres, to use existing organisations: thus an EIE is created through a convention between ADEME, one or several financial partners (generally the Regional Council) and a host organisation. Host organisations are usually non-governmental organisations (associations) specialised in housing or environmental issues. The funds allocated by ADEME, the regional councils and other financial partners are intended to support one or several energy advisors within the host organisation but do not cover the full operation of the organisation.

Besides funding, ADEME also provides initial and permanent training for the energy advisers, produces brochures and support material, such as exhibits that the EIE can use in their activities. ADEME ensures the organization, animation and coordination of the national EIE network and, through its 26 regional delegations, that of each regional network. One staff member of each regional delegation is in charge of overseeing the operation of the regional EIE network. The other financial partners such as regions or municipalities often also participate in the piloting of the regional networks.

To become, and remain, an EIE, the host organisation has to provide free individualised information to the public, to develop a local outreach programme by participating in markets and fairs and other local awareness-raising activities and to report on its activities to ADEME on an annual basis.

79 in 2001 (representing 123 advisers), the number of EIEs currently reaches 187 (340 advisers). The territorial grid has been consolidated (although some areas remain poorly covered), the organization at the regional level reinforced, and the EIEs' activity has known a tremendous growth. The number of persons addressed passed from 100 000 in 2002 to 530 000 in 2004. The EIEs organised 8 500 events between 2002 and 2004, raised the awareness of 850 000 people and distributed 1 000 000 documents.

EIEs have become in France essential actors for information and advice for individuals and local actors. They thus constitute a pillar of the French Climate Change policy.

OBJECTIVES

In 2004, ADEME carried out an assessment of the first three years of the EIE network but only limited to the first mission of the EIE: the individualised energy advice (BVA-IDE Environnement, 2004). The evaluation had shown that nearly 90 % of the public was satisfied with the advice delivered by the EIE and that more than one quarter of the contacts led to actions that reduced energy consumption, thus contributing to greenhouse gases emission reductions.

In 2005, ADEME wished to evaluate the second mission of the EIEs, organisation of and participation in outreach activities, in order to have a clear vision of their strong points and their weaknesses, to confirm the devices in place and/or to suggest possible changes.

This study intervened within a particular period for EIEs: their reputation increasing strongly, EIEs have experienced an increase in activity that is now too much to handle. In view of the saturation of many EIEs, and the impossibility of funding more and more energy advisers, ADEME wishes to:

- concentrate the EIEs' activities on their main target, households, and topic, energy in dwellings and, in particular on

individualised advice: the EIE are thus encouraged to limit the diversification of the topics covered (excluding waste or water management, for example) and to concentrate on the fields in which their skills are recognized and their added value high: energy and housing;

- analyse the comparative effectiveness of the outreach actions in order to support those which present the most impacts (e.g. energy saved) and the highest returns (e.g. beneficiary satisfaction).

Contrary to the first assessment, which was nationwide, ADEME chose to focus the evaluation of outreach activities on three pilot regions of France (The Centre in which Orléans is located; The Nord-Pas de Calais, the main city of which is Lille and Rhône-Alpes, the region of Lyon and Grenoble). Such focalisation was intended to permit a detailed assessment including each of the EIEs of the chosen regions rather than a general study where only a few EIEs were assessed. The three regions were selected because of their distinctive characteristics:

- Both Rhone-Alpes and Nord-Pas de Calais boast of historical energy management policies and are at the forefront as regions active in energy management in a country which is nevertheless highly centralised.
- Rhone-Alpes is well-known for its strong support of renewable energies, solar energy in particular. It possesses a large number of well-established, highly technical NGOs active in supporting renewable energy.
- The Nord Pas-de-Calais, the region of metropolitan France where households have the lowest available gross income, has carried out a strong energy efficiency programme for over 20 years and energy efficiency remains the prevalent theme in this region.
- The EIE network in Centre is much younger and in full evolution. Many of the host organisations are environmental NGOs created only in the late 90s. The regional network develops actions with more diversified themes and public than the two other regions. In Centre, the reinforcement of the capacities of intermediaries which can relay the EIE's action is a strong objective, concretized through many actions targeting organizations or people that can serve as relays between the EIEs and the general public (teachers and other NGOs for instance).

The conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation of the 30 EIEs from the 3 regions are therefore useful for the other Regional networks.

In the frame of this study, ICE, a consulting company specialised in energy management, produced:

- a quantitative assessment of the outreach actions carried out in 2003 and 2004 highlighting the number and type of outreach actions, the nature of the public, the theme addressed, etc.
- a qualitative assessment which consisted in an evaluation of the participants' satisfaction and of the impacts in terms of actions taken after their participation.
- an analysis of the efficiency of the outreach actions;

- recommendations allowing to improve the EIEs as a whole.

In parallel, ICE provided proposals to improve subsequent assessments of the EIEs.

Methodology applied

QUANTITATIVE ASSESSMENT

This phase aimed at characterising the outreach actions implemented in 2003 and 2004. There is not fixed programme for carrying out outreach activities. Each EIE, or each regional network when there is stronger coordination, can decide which outreach activities it wants to organise at a given period. Thus, the outreach programme is often elaborated based on external solicitations: a financial partner such as a municipality requests that the EIE participates in a municipal fair or holds a conference; a school requests that the EIE deliver a conference for school children, etc. It was therefore necessary to gather information on the activities carried out and to characterise these activities.

The quantitative assessment was based on the analysis of the data-processing software “contacts.PIE” specially developed to help EIEs report on their activity. The software allows each EIE to record the principal characteristics of the outreach actions that it leads (nine characteristics need to be filled out: type of action, nature of the action, topic of the action, town and place in which the action took place, type of public addressed, duration of the action, time spent for the preparation and the implementation of the action, number of people reached). Each of the 30 EIE studied by ICE provided the list of its outreach actions in the form of an Excel export file. These data were completed by the EIEs’ annual activity reports and by direct interview of EIE advisers and the ADEME engineers in charge of coordinating each regional network.

ICE defined 10 types of action (the software only allowed four possibilities):

- Workshops: training sessions or working groups with no more than 15 participants
- Conferences: seminars, conferences in which there are more than 15 participants
- School events: actions targeting primary or secondary school pupils (this category does not include events for professional students or high-school pupils which are included in the “conference” category¹)
- Fairs/Markets/Exhibitions: these type of events were further distinguished according to their topic:
 - specialized events: their topic is one of the privileged topics of the EIE: energy and housing (A Housing Fair, a Renewable Energy Fair for instance)
 - general events: trade fairs, markets, community fairs, art festivals, student festivals, NGO forums, etc.

- events on environment: organic food fairs, nature festivals, well-being fairs, etc.

- On-site visits: visits organised on a private or public site that demonstrates one or several best practices such as solar panels, wind power, etc.), technical demonstrations or open days in individual homes.
- Technical aid: assistance to municipalities in developing sustainable energy programs.
- Communication actions: television, radio programmes, mass mailing and press.

Several topics, from the general to the specific were identified. For instance:

- General topics: buildings, environment, transport, energy production, presentation of EIE’s missions
- Specific topics for energy production: solar energy, wind energy, wood energy, all types of energy production.

The public addressed was specified as much as possible: the software only permits to distinguish between the general public, professionals and elected officials. Thanks to the annual reports and the commentaries given by the advisers, ICE classified the public in a more detailed manner:

- the general public (in which the category “low income households” was further identified),
- organisations (NGOs, public administrations, social organisations),
- the field of education (teachers, students, pupils),
- energy and buildings professionals (solar, wood professionals, craftsmen, etc.),
- other professionals (undetermined professions, professionals from tourism, agriculture, etc.),
- elected officials.

QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT

The purpose of the qualitative assessment was to characterise the audience for the outreach actions, to evaluate their motivation, their project, their degree of satisfaction with respect to the action, and the impact of the action in terms of change in behaviours or take-up.

For the markets and fairs, an on-site survey was realized during six events (selected so that two took place in Centre, two in the Nord-Pas de Calais Region and two in Rhone-Alpes; and so that two were specialised events, two environment-oriented and two general fairs or markets) by two investigators.

For the workshops, conferences and on-site visits, the Consultants carried out telephone surveys with more than 200 participants of actions that occurred in 2004 or 2005.

Taking into account the specificity of each category of action, adapted questionnaires were produced: a questionnaire for “markets and fairs”, a questionnaire for “workshops and conferences”, a questionnaire for “on-site visits”. For workshops, conferences and on-site visits, the questionnaires were further differentiated according to whether addressed to a private individual or to a professional.

1. This distinction is linked to the fact that school events carried out by EIEs are, theoretically, excluded from ADEME funding since these activities are already funded through other channels.

Table 1. Number and percentage of each category of activities in the three regions

	Centre		Nord-Pas de Calais		Rhône-Alpes		TOTAL	
School event	18	9%	13	5%	19	3%	50	3%
Technical aid	15	8%	5	1%	0	0%	20	1%
Workshop	32	17%	231	36%	81	11%	344	21%
Conference	38	20%	135	21%	194	25%	367	23%
Fair/market/exhibition	73	38%	185	29%	260	34%	518	32%
On-site visit	12	6%	44	7%	220	28%	276	17%
Unknown	4	2%	31	5%	1	0%	36	2%
Total	192		644		775		1 611	

Results: the outreach actions

The 30 EIE evaluated organised a total of 1 600 outreach actions in 2003 and 2004, respectively 640 in Nord-Pas de Calais, 775 in Rhône-Alpes and close to 200 in Centre where there are far less and younger EIEs than in the other two regions.²

The setting-up of booths in fairs represents the largest group in the three regions, with the exception of specialised workshops in Nord-Pas de Calais devoted to helping low income populations with the management of their energy bills. On-site visits is also a major category, especially in Rhône-Alpes, which boasts of a large number of renewable energy installations that are ideal for technical demonstration visits. Conferences are the third major category of outreach actions.

FOCUSED ON RENEWABLE ENERGY RATHER THAN ENERGY CONSERVATION

All actions together, the topics of energy in general and energy production – renewable energy in particular – are more often the focus than the subject of energy conservation. The topics of environmental protection and transport are less often addressed. Incidentally, the EIEs spend a significant amount of their time presenting their own mission and activities but this may be linked with the fact that the EIE network was in its first years of operations.

Each category of actions was further analysed in order to determine whether certain topics or client groups prevailed:

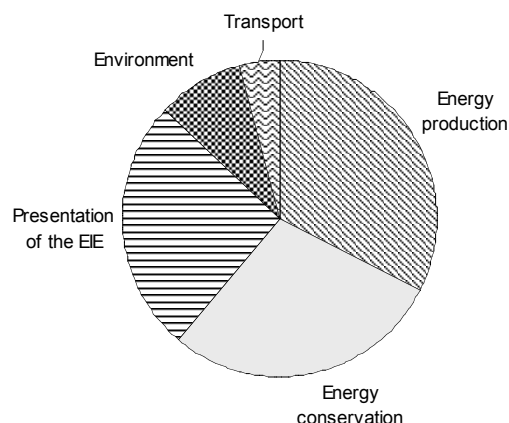


Figure 1. Distribution of the topics dealt with

WORKSHOPS AND CONFERENCES: FROM THE VERY GENERAL TO THE VERY SPECIFIC

The EIEs' interventions in workshops and conferences mainly concern the presentation to a diversified public of energy issues tackled in a very general way.

Yet, these types of actions also allow the EIEs to target specific publics on specialised subjects: it is the case with the "budgetary workshops" for energy-poor populations in Nord-Pas de Calais (and Centre) or with "technical workshops" on specific energy technologies in all three regions, but more particularly in Rhone-Alpes.

ON-SITE VISITS: RENEWABLE ENERGIES IN FIRST PLACE

The very large majority of the on-site visits relates to renewable energies: mainly wood-energy in Centre and solar energy in Rhone-Alpes. General public and professionals constitute the majority public of these visits, but they also attract a significant number of elected officials. In Nord-Pas de Calais, the on-site visits focus less on renewable technologies and more on High Environmental Quality (HQE³) buildings, generally schools and other public buildings.

TECHNICAL AID AND SCHOOL ANIMATIONS: MINOR ACTIVITIES

School events and technical aid represent relatively marginal actions compared to the other outreach actions: only 20 cases of technical aid were listed for two years of activity (15 in Centre and 5 in Nord Pas-de-Calais Region) and 50 school

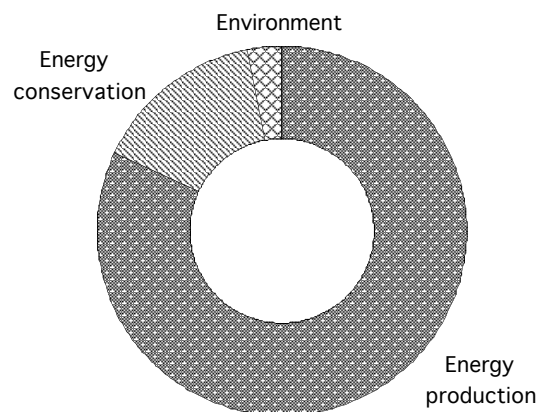


Figure 2. Topic addressed during the On-site visits

2. This total does not include communication actions, which could not be counted due to very poor recording (or no recording at all) in the EIE software.

3. HQE is a certification delivered to buildings that respect a certain number of environmental characteristics that go from clean building sites and environmentally-friendly building materials to rainwater collection and low energy-consumption when in use.

animations. In Rhone-Alpes, technical aid is not considered as outreach actions: EIE are given distinct funding from the Regional Council and ADEME to assist local communities in their sustainable energy policies.

COMMUNICATION ACTIONS: LITTLE INFORMATION AVAILABLE

All three regional networks carry out communication actions, especially radio programmes: for example, in Nord-Pas de Calais, the regional network appeared on a weekly programme providing information to listeners on energy saving and renewable energy use at home. EIEs are also often contacted and interviewed by journalists. Some EIEs frequently write articles in the local or regional press. It was, however, impossible to produce a reliable assessment of these communication actions as they are not systematically recorded in the EIEs data base. The need for adopting, at the national level, a homogeneous system of treatment for these actions – both recording them and evaluating their impact – is one of the recommendations of the assessment.

MARKETS AND FAIRS: THE DOMINANT ACTIVITY

Markets and Fairs very clearly constitute the dominant outreach action of the three regional networks and use 50 % of the time devoted to the outreach actions. With the exception of the communication actions, they are the category which reaches in volume and proportion the greatest number of people (see Figure 3). The presence of an EIE adviser is well appreciated, even expected, in many fairs and markets, regardless of the type of event considered. Two reasons may explain these expectations:

- On the part of the EIEs local financiers: EIEs are expected to participate to most local events as a means to broadcast the local authority's actions in favour of energy efficiency or renewable energy promotion
- On the part of the public: a growing and generalised awakening to the stakes related to climate change, energy price increase and energy resource depletion might account for this appreciation.

EIEs indiscriminately hold booths in all types of fairs or markets: specialised events, devoted to energy and buildings, environment-oriented or general.

The public reached during the fairs and markets is correlated to the type of event:

- general events tend to attract all types of population, and are a good vector to reach, in particular, young people, the unemployed and women;
- demonstrations relating to the environment collect an older and already sensitized public, typically male;
- private individuals carrying out a concrete renovation or construction project attend the professional markets and real estate fairs.

Globally, the demand for information in markets and fairs concerns renewable energy projects in general and solar energy in particular, more than energy efficiency.

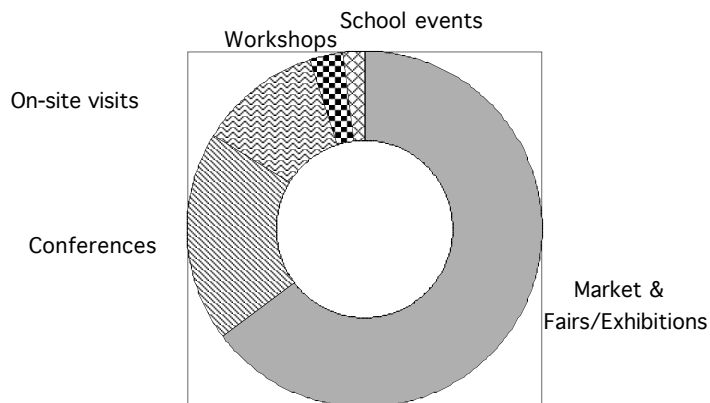


Figure 3. Population reached by each category of action, in %

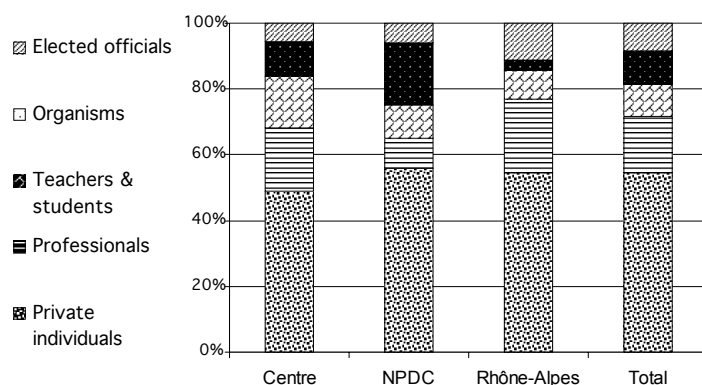


Figure 4. Distribution of the type of public attending the outreach actions

The public targeted

Private individuals constitute the main target of the EIEs' outreach actions with over 55 % of the actions. Professionals also form an important but largely diversified target. Lastly, elected officials are relatively well targeted since they are present in 10 % (14 % in Rhone-Alpes).

IN MAJORITY: A WORKING-AGE PUBLIC WITH A HIGH LEVEL OF SENSITIVITY TO SUSTAINABLE ENERGY ISSUES

The typical public of the outreach actions is a private individual, over 35, employed, and a home owner, with no predominance of male or female. Although the questionnaire does not allow us to ascertain this fact, it seems that the public of these actions have a social standing and level of education higher than average (this is not true in Nord-Pas de Calais).

The 16-24 year-old age bracket is clearly under-represented. Very few students attend the workshops, conferences, on-site visits (less than 3 %) whereas they represent nearly 10 % of the national population.

As a whole, the public of the EIEs' outreach actions is the same type of public generally reached by ADEME. It has a level of awareness concerning environmental issues higher than that of the national population. For example, 67 % consider that individual actions are effective in mitigating climate change compared to only 44 % of the French population.

EIEs are also better known or recognised by the public that participates in outreach actions than by the average of the French population since a good number has already dealt with the advice services. However, when asked to quote organizations in charge of energy savings and renewable energies, few of this sample population quote the EIE spontaneously. That seems to indicate the low public knowledge of the EIE rather than a general lack of information on energy actions since the majority of them spontaneously quote ADEME.

Their move towards the EIE generally fits within a pre-existent project. This request relates primarily to renewable energies and, in particular, to solar energy.

WORK THROUGH "AGENTS": A PRACTICE TO BE DEVELOPED

The assessment distinguished participants directly targeted by the outreach actions from those which constitute agents between the EIEs and the final public. Social workers, teachers, and to a certain extent, professionals from the building and energy sectors can be regarded as agents of the EIE missions. The objective of the EIE, while working with these groups, is to reinforce their capacity to relay the messages on sustainable energy towards a specific target, e.g. low income households for social workers, pupils and students for teachers, customers for professionals.

Public officers, elected officials and associations are more difficult to classify. Depending on the situation, these groups constitute direct targets or agents. For instance, an elected official becomes an agent when she or he takes part in an outreach action in order to prepare a public awareness campaign on sustainable energy for the inhabitants of his or her community.

The agent has thus been defined as a public who participates in an EIE outreach action with the objective to carry out an educational project on energy or climate change issue towards his or her own target.

The investigation on workshops and conferences has shown that more than half of the professionals questioned attended the workshop or conference because they ought to improve their message or service towards their customers regarding energy efficiency and renewable energy. 87 % of the social workers interviewed, 57 % of the associations and 44 % of the elected officials or public agents declared that they had started a campaign or an educational project on sustainable energy after EIEs' outreach action.

The agents are important stakeholders as they increase the impact of EIEs' actions and enable the development of new ways of working based on partnerships.

THE PROFESSIONAL PUBLIC REMAINS ESSENTIALLY UNSPECIFIED

Half of the professions recorded are unspecified. Consequently the EIE have only very limited information on the type of professionals whom they managed to target and cannot objectively determine towards which professional groups an increased effort should be developed. For the remaining half, two groups can be distinguished:

- Professions directly impacted by the EIE activities (the building sector, renewable energy installers, and actors of the forestry and wood sectors): the majority of the actions (64 %) target building sector professionals.
- Other professions: the main focus groups vary according to the region; for instance, while Centre strongly targets the agricultural sector (at least 35 % of the actions), Nord Pas-de-Calais directs a large part of its efforts towards the tertiary sector, in particular hotels and tourist resorts.

Multiple vectors of communication around the actions

The vectors of communication are the means by which the EIE informs the public about an event in which it intervenes. All in all, no vector of communication is to be neglected since all have a relative effectiveness. The vector is largely dependent on the context, i.e. it depends on the specific regional characteristics and the type of actions (see Table 2).

For instance, for workshops and conferences, professional organizations (enterprises, Family Allowance Offices, associations, district companies, etc) are the most effective vectors in the Regions of Nord-Pas de Calais and Centre, which are characterized by a greater dialogue with the agents than in Rhône-Alpes. In Rhone-Alpes, the EIE network seems more autonomous, even self-sufficient: the seniority and grounding of the host structures is stronger than in the two other regions.

"Word of mouth" or "Local authorities" have a low level of effectiveness for on-site visits, and to a lesser extent for workshops and conferences, but they become efficient sources of communication for fairs and shows.

At the national level, this means that no vector of communication can be privileged compared to another and that it is essential to take into account the regional particularisms and the type of actions when selecting which vector to use.

Table 2. How were the participants informed about the outreach action?

	Workshops & Conferences	On-site visits	Markets & Fairs
Directly by the EIE	20%	38%	11%
By a professional organisation	27%	5%	5%
Through the media	11%	19%	29%
By a local authority	16%	8%	22%
By word of mouth	8%	3%	17%
Other	13%	1,5%	18%
Don't know	6%	12%	0%

The satisfaction of the participants

All in all, the notes are positive and show that the participants of the outreach actions are largely satisfied with the service rendered by the EIE.

The presence of the EIE is well appreciated in the various markets and fairs, regardless of the type of event considered. The current context of heightened awareness of environmental issues, energy resource depletion and higher energy prices could explain this very positive appreciation.

Participants in workshops and conferences prove to be well satisfied with the various aspects of the service rendered: number of participants, length and clarity of the presentation, exchanges between the public and the speaker and skills and competence of the EIE adviser. The professionals tend however to consider the presentation too short.

The public of on-site visits is globally well satisfied with the different aspects of the service: accessibility of the site being visited, number of visitors, exchanges between the speaker and the public, skills and competence of the EIE adviser. The principal reason for the dissatisfaction of private individuals relates to the lack of installers in the region where they are located, but EIEs are not accountable for this.

The lack of availability of advisers in the EIE's booths in specialised fairs and shows, where people queue a long time to obtain personalised advice, explains the lower mark for fairs and shows.

Impact of the outreach actions

PARTICIPANTS ALREADY HAVE A PROJECT IN MIND WHEN THEY ATTEND THE EVENT

The majority of the private individuals had a project (retrofit, new installation or change in behaviour) in mind or underway when they participated in the outreach action.

The EIE generally does not initiate the project idea but helps confirm (or disprove) its relevance, and eventually contributes to its concretisation. Most participants intend to carry out not one but several measures following the outreach action (to renovate/construct or install something, to change behaviour, to seek more information). Actions are thus not considered separately, which testifies of the global character of the step: energy efficiency and environmental protection are integrated in the set of the project parameters.

However, the "gross" impact, i.e. the intentions of actions of those who have no pre-existing project when they participate in the action, is not to be neglected: more than half of the participants with no preliminary project intend to change behaviour afterward (e.g. after a workshop or a demonstration) or with an emergent idea of a renewable energy set-up (especially after an on-site visit).

THE PROJECTS CARRIED BY THE PARTICIPANTS HAVE A "SOLAR" FOCUS

The projects of the participants, before or after the outreach action, mostly concern the installation of thermal or photovoltaic solar panels or the construction of a passive house including solar components. In addition, the proportion of those considering a solar project increases after the outreach action.

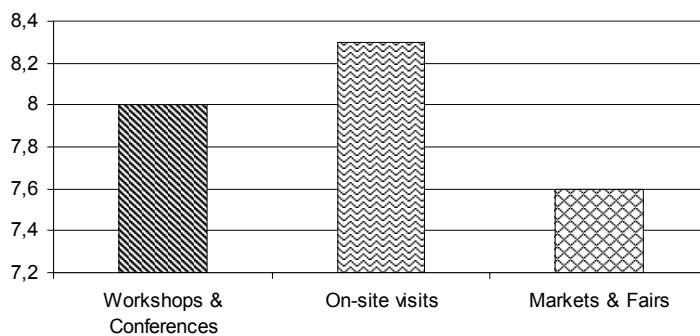


Figure 5. Mark on 10 given by the participants to the outreach action

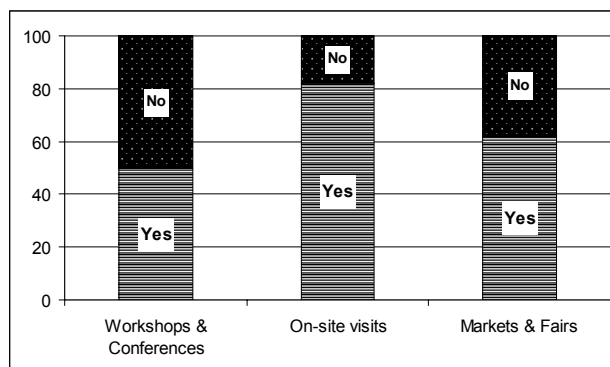


Figure 6. Existence of a project before the outreach action

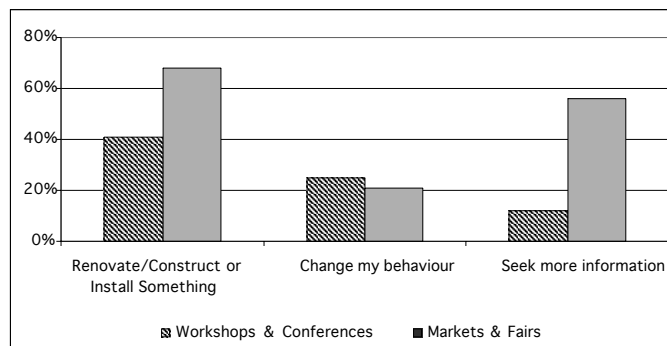


Figure 7. Decision taken after the action

The important uptake of solar installation projects, in particular photovoltaic projects, is surprising since only one quarter of those surveyed attended an event focused on solar energy. Nevertheless, these technologies benefit from tax credits and regional subsidies as well as strong information campaigns; thus the uptake is not directly linked to the EIEs' activities.

A LEVERAGE EFFECT ON THE FIRST MISSION OF THE EIE: THE INDIVIDUALISED ADVICE ACTIVITY

The various outreach actions improve the EIEs' reputation and feed the individualised advice activity of the EIE advisers. Most participants, well satisfied with the service, state that they will speak about the EIE in their entourage and encourage their close relations to take part in other actions organized by the

EIE or to contact them directly. They often wish to pursue the step engaged at the time of the outreach action and to recontact the EIE in order to deepen their research (see Table 3). The consequences of this leverage effect are both positive and negative:

- the outreach actions seem to trigger decision-making or reinforce projects that were only prospects or vague intentions;
- however, the outreach actions cause an increase in the workload of already saturated EIE advisers, so much that some do not propose that participants contact them for an individualized and often more detailed council after the event. Moreover, some participants are becoming dissatisfied because they can not reach advisers by telephone (the main means of contact with an EIE) and have to stand in long queues to talk to an adviser at outreach events.

EIE: AN IMPORTANT BOOSTER TO CONCRETIZE THE STEPS

The outreach activities enable the participants to consolidate their original intention. The fact that the majority of the respondents who intend to seek more information turn towards a professional (craftsmen, installers, architects, research and engineering companies) proves that the intention becomes a

Table 3. Intend to contact the EIE again....

Workshops and conferences	On-site visits	Markets and Fairs
43%	84%	97%

project to be turned into reality. In this sense, the EIE constitute a springboard for the professional sector and the renovation/construction or installation operations.

AN IMPACT DIFFICULT TO QUANTIFY BUT CONSIDERABLE

The 2004 IDE Environnement assessment on the individualized advice activity revealed that 76 % of those having contacted an EIE plan to implement some measure following their exchange with the EIE adviser. It is what we call the “potential of action”.

The potential of action of the individualized advice activity is stronger than that of the outreach actions. Nevertheless, the impact of fairs & shows (in which individual advice is given) and that of workshops & conferences (in which the EIE answer a collective and vague request rather than personal and specific requests) remains relatively high as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Percentage of respondents who intend to take measures after contact with the EIE

	Individualised advice	Markets and Fairs	Workshops & Conferences
Measure concerning...			
Heating system	46%	28%	21%
Solar hot water	25%	32%	33%
Thermal insulation	19%	4%	8%
PV system installation	1%	5%	33%

Recommendations

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

To reinforce the actions on energy conservation

EIEs should reinforce the actions promoting energy conservation by:

- directing the public without preliminary projects in priority towards changes in behaviour and operations that reduce energy consumption, in particular: insulation, replacement of energy-consuming equipment by more energy efficient appliances, optimization of heating systems (pipe insulation, regulation), etc.;
- encouraging the public developing a renewable energy project to work in parallel on energy conservation systems. Some leads:
 - To use as often as possible the exhibit of the “energy-efficient dwelling” in fairs, shows and exhibitions: this exhibit, which shows the various means in which a household can reduced their energy consumption, attracts many people in markets and fairs
 - To organise more frequently visits in HQE (French reference for High Environmental Quality Buildings) buildings or energy efficient dwellings which show the technical and behavioural parameters allowing a building to be conceived and used in a energy (and water) efficient way.
 - To implement in every region “budgetary workshops” such as those of Nord-Pas de Calais which help specific categories of consumers to learn about durable and less expensive way to consume energy.

To select markets and fairs more stringently

Today, more and more, EIEs are being offered free booths by the organisers of markets or fairs (often local authorities) as they have become key actors on the local scene. This activity, certainly very effective in terms of number of people reached and eventually sensitized, is however time-consuming. EIEs should start to be more selective. In order to do so, they need to improve the quality of the return on each event in which they have participated. This could be helped by the elaboration of an evaluation and follow-up system, based on criteria determined at the regional level. In the framework of its services, the Consultant proposed two options that seemed compatible with the constraints relative to this type of action.

To rationalize the working time

The efficiency of an action can be evaluated by using as an indicator the ratio between time spent to prepare and carry out the action and the number of people reached. However, because the outreach actions carried out are quite diverse, it is difficult to draw strategic conclusions on which type of action should be supported and developed and which abandoned. The type of outreach actions carried out generally depends on regional characteristics and strategies which are cannot be generalised to the whole EIE network.

Nevertheless, such an indicator is clearly relevant to measure the “intrinsic” efficiency of one type of action (for instance, markets and fairs) by:

- Comparing, for one EIE, several actions of the same type: e.g. the EIE can compare all the conferences that it participated in over one year to establish the characteristics (topic, mode of organization, vector of communication, hour and date, etc.) of those which manage to sensitize more people. If the reporting software of the EIEs is upgraded, an automatic calculation of this indicator could be added.
- Comparing, between regions, the indicator for a type of action. Thus, Table 5 highlights the formidable efficiency of the Rhone-Alpes region in comparison Nord-Pas de Calais and Centre and questions the modes of organization of the latter. We will explain later how EIEs can benefit from an interregional comparison and a greater dialogue with EIEs of other regions.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO THE TARGETED PUBLIC

To diversify the targets

The general public is the main target of the EIE network. At a regional level, however, certain social groups within the general public are not well represented:

- in Rhone-Alpes, few actions concern low-income households;
- in Centre, the general public constitutes finally a minority public in workshops, conferences and on-site visits (which most often aim at professionals) and the elected officials are little represented;
- in Nord-Pas de Calais, the professionals and the elected officials are categories on which the EIE could invest more;
- Finally, in all the Regions, it would be desirable to develop a greater number of actions towards young people and students.

To develop actions towards these categories of target, EIEs need to better identify them (see Chapter « Evaluation »).

To increase the recourse to agents

Concerted actions, training and technical aid for a public already sensitized and professionals go beyond the limits of the mission first allotted to the EIE. They express a need identified in the education field and the professional world and also confirm the need for having recourse to other agents, making it possible to multiply EIEs’ actions. This is all the more important

in a context where ADEME’s funding for EIEs can no longer increase (e.g. to create more EIEs) and may even decrease.

To promote the public mission carried out by the EIE better, in particular towards visitors of fairs and shows

EIEs suffer from a confused image. The articulation between the energy adviser, the EIE service, the host organisation, ADEME, and the other financers is not understood by the respondents. This confusion is likely to be reinforced by the fact that today certain energy professionals – heating specialists, installers, electricians, etc – have started calling themselves energy advisers. If the image of the EIE, as a public service that provides free and independent advice, is not well clarified for the public, there is a risk of recovery and diversion by private interests.

Concretely, in fairs & shows especially, an effort of communication could be carried out in order to emphasize the identity and the mission of the EIE: a large panel with the EIE logo could present the service in a few simple sentences: (1) free advice (2) an independent and neutral service (3) a public interest mission... The EIE network’s activities and statute could also be quickly presented during workshops, conferences and on-site visits.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO THE IMPACT OF THE OUT-REACH ACTIONS

To direct as quickly as possible the public towards professionals

Because of the surcharge of work of the EIEs, the participants have increasing difficulties in contacting the advisers: some are becoming dissatisfied and the EIEs’ image is likely to suffer from this counter-performance. As an important increase in the number of advisers is not yet possible, it could be preferable to lengthen opening hours in the EIE’s office for the individualized advice activity and to sacrifice certain outreach actions consequently (school events, technical aid or ineffective markets and fairs).

To reduce the extra work also implies to direct as quickly as possible, the public towards professionals. Thus, calls to an EIE’s office could be saved if the EIE provided visitors at markets and fairs with lists of qualified energy professionals and craftsmen. These lists are generally only handed out when the public directly visits the EIE’s office.

To evaluate in-house the impact of the actions

It is crucial for the EIE to know if the public has taken an effective action following the EIE’s intervention. The advisers have already developed various systems to make this assessment, but none are official or completely satisfactory.

Table 5. Number of people reached per day worked

	Centre	Nord-Pas de Calais	Rhône-Alpes	Average by event
School events	27	9	15	18
Workshops	5	4	11	5
Conferences	19	12	39	22
Markets & Fairs /Exhibitions	37	20	70	36
On-site visits	34	10	24	21
Average by region	28	14	46	26

One proposal could be to solicit the professionals with whom the advisers are used to working with. These professionals could be asked to record the nature of the requests emanating from private individuals advised and directed to them by the EIE and to specify precisely the types of project carried out (technology and capacity installed, household consumption, etc.). A regular return towards the EIE would make it possible for the advisers to evaluate, roughly, the impact of their actions.

To reinforce the knowledge on professionals other than solar

Our aim is not to regret the tendency towards “more solar”, all in all appreciable and which should still be encouraged. However, the reasons why other renewable energy projects or energy savings projects are less attractive for the public should be studied. Do EIEs have a list of local professionals in other fields than solar? Do they have regular contacts with these other professionals? If such is the case, it is important to encourage as much as possible the public to consider all the technological options available. If not, the first action is to constitute an in-house data base on these actors.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO THE REGIONAL NETWORKS

To take into account the regional contexts and to agree on program-objectives Region by Region

We have seen that the regional context has an important impact on the types of actions implemented as well as on their efficiency. It appears desirable thus to leave room for the regional networks to define and implement their projects, without seeking a national harmonization at all costs.

The effectiveness of an action can only be evaluated with regards to the goal which it pursues. For example, a EIE does not have the same goal whether it holds a booth in a general fair, a specialized fair or an environmental fair.

We can distinguish three contrasted situations:

- The EIE operates in a region that is not very dynamic as regards energy conservation and is not well known by the public (for example, it receives few requests for individualised advice): its primary objective is to raise the general awareness level on its territory and to make itself known: the presence of an EIE stand in general fairs and markets contributes to achieve this goal.
- The EIE has an undeniable success while participating in regional events but receives few calls compared to other regions: the presence of a EIE both is expected in environmental fairs and markets but even more in specialized fairs. In this case, it is necessary to take care to provide the EIE booth with a sufficient number of advisers to face the high level of request.
- The EIE does not need to move to be solicited since the requests are very numerous: it is then necessary to select the events in which it intervenes better (the environmental and specialized fairs are to be privileged) and to strongly communicate to announce “exceptional decentralized permanence”.

To encourage exchanges of good practices

In parallel, and in complement to the preceding proposals, we recommend that exchanges of good practice between EIEs are reinforced. The national meeting of the EIE, which takes place once a year, does not constitute a sufficient tool. For this reason, we propose some several leads:

- The implementation, within the national EIE network, of working groups and resources centres: for example, as the Region Nord-Pas de Calais is clearly in advance on energy poverty issues, a working group on energy poverty, animated by EIE advisers from Nord-Pas de Calais could be set up at national level and meet 3 or 4 times a year to discuss progress, obstacles, strategies.
- Exchanges of “adviser-trainees”: a region having identified a deficiency in its network on a topic or with a particular public could send an adviser to train in another region where this public or this topic is tackled with efficiency. For example, advisers from other regions could be accommodated in the EIEs of Rhone-Alpes in order to follow, during few weeks, the method used when organising on-site visits in this region and to draw lessons from it that could be applied in their own region. The efforts of reinforcement of the “agents” in Centre could in the same way interest the EIEs of regions in which the concerted action remains embryonic: a training course of a few days would be an effective means to transmit the know-how of one network to the other.

RELATING TO THE EVALUATION

The present study constitutes the first evaluation of the EIEs’ outreach actions. It was a complex work considering the varied type of actions assessed and the diversity of the publics targeted. This work enabled to emphasize the principal difficulties related to this type of evaluation and allows some conclusions related to the efficiency of future assessments.

To discuss and establish national conventions...

... on the nomenclature of the types of outreach actions, how to treat communication actions, the method of calculating time spent on each action, the method of counting the number of people reached and actually sensitized. In the same manner, certain categories of information, and in particular those which concern the professional public, deserve to be treated with more accuracy.

These conventions could then be diffused widely through the EIE network and short training sessions organized within the frame of the regional or national networks usual EIE meetings.

Using the software “contacts.PIE”, those improvements would make it possible to rapidly establish a precise quantitative assessment and thus to concentrate the work on the qualitative assessment.

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