

The International Clean Energy Challenge: bright young minds tackle the energy transition

A cutting-edge event, 64 young professionals from around the world, 11 partner companies, 5 days in Upper Austria, 1 mission: tackling real-life challenges for the energy transition!

A unique event

How to make the clean energy transition happen is one of the key challenges the world is facing. The International Clean Energy Challenge, a five-day event held in 2019 in Upper Austria by the OÖ Energiesparverband (ESV), the regional energy agency, brought together 64 highly qualified young professionals from more than 30 countries and 11 partner companies for an event of collaborative innovation. In diversified and interdisciplinary teams, they worked at finding new solutions and ideas for real-life challenges presented by the companies. The objectives were to inspire and motivate the younger generation of professionals (under 33 years old) for energy-related topics, benefit from their creativity and fresh outlook and contribute to solutions for the energy transition and energy innovation in Upper Austria. The event was held in the context of the NEFI project "Industrial Microgrids".



200 applications from throughout the world

The event was promoted worldwide and to people from all sectors. In addition to age (33 years or less), eligibility criteria included minimum work experience of 3 years or an undergraduate degree (e.g. bachelor), strong interest in the clean energy transition and good knowledge of English. The attractive concept triggered an impressive response: 200 high-potential candidates from 43 countries applied! The 64 selected participants consisted of young professionals working in businesses, industry, energy agencies, associations, public bodies and research institutions and some students in advanced education. They came from a diversity of educational backgrounds including engineering, economy, architecture, business administration, chemistry, mathematics, law, political science and more.

10 forerunner Austrian companies and organisations recognised the unique value of this opportunity and got on board with the ESV. These were Aigner Energie Contracting, Beckhoff Automation, EEW AG/Wels Strom, Fronius, ÖkoFEN, Peneder, Scheuch, STIWA, TU Wien/Energy Economics Group and the University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria. Most of these are members of the Cleantech-Cluster (CTC), a network of 250 businesses in Upper Austria supported by the ESV.

Finding solutions in divers and interdisciplinary teams

Over the course of the event, the teams tackled real-life challenges presented by the partner companies on topics relating to energy efficiency and renewable energy in industry, buildings, e-mobility and more. A key common element in many groups was working on new concepts and services for energy communities of all types – emphasising how important this topic is for the energy transition.

Each of the 11 teams was assigned to a specific company challenge, typically consisting of a service, concept or market that the company is keen on developing or expanding. Many of the groups worked on business models based on digitisation, value generation with big data, new integrated energy service models, diversifying demand and supply chains, new marketing approaches, energy communities and other peer-to-peer energy exchanges.





Collaboration rather than competition

The ESV developed a dynamic and structured innovation process consisting of a combination of brainstorming activities, collaborative thinking across disciplines, autonomous group work and peer-review sessions. Interactive elements such as "café social", "mix'n'match picnic lunch" and "peer-to-peer pitches" created an atmosphere of collaboration rather than competition.

The company representatives were present throughout the entire event and offered valuable support and professional coaching. In the final session, each group presented its solutions to a jury consisting of management-level representatives of the partner companies (including a number of CEOs) as well as the regional energy commissioner.

An event with lasting impact

The event received very positive feedback from all those who took part. By bringing together early-career participants from throughout the world, the Clean Energy Challenge will have international impact on driving the energy transition for years to come. For the participants, the benefits were manifold. They had the opportunity to network with forward-thinking companies and benefit from professional mentoring and training from their management staff. By contributing to concrete company development processes, they gained practical and real-life insights on how driving the energy transition and doing business can go hand-in-hand. They met other young innovators from all over the world and built-up their peer network. They were inspired for new ways of thinking about the energy transition. The companies profited from the fresh ideas and creative thinking of bright young minds. The overall experience spurred innovation and contributed to driving the energy transition in Upper Austria and beyond.

The event at a glance

Name: International Clean Energy Challenge

Date: 22-26 July, 2019

Location: Spital am Pyhrn, Upper Austria

Participants:

- 64 young professionals and students from 30 countries
- 11 partner companies and organisations: Aigner Energie Contracting, Beckhoff Automation, ESV, EWW AG/Wels Strom, Fronius International, ÖkoFEN, Peneder, Scheuch, STIWA, TU Wien/Energy Economics Group, University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria

Created and organised by the OÖ Energiesparverband (ESV), the regional energy agency of Upper Austria

Held in the context of the NEFI project "Industrial Microgrids"

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