


# **SOCIAL INTERVENTION FOR ENERGY SOLIDARITY: THE WISE PROJECT IN BULGARIA**

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**Abstract:** The article will present the Bulgarian component of the *WISE – Women in Solidarity for Energy* project as a social intervention for community building and feminist democratic learning, rather than a technical or policy-only initiative. It will argue that WISE functions as an embryonic infrastructure for collective care and civic imagination—a prototype of a *pan-European movement for energy justice* that transforms the very notion of “solidarity” from charity into mutual empowerment and political participation. Drawing on *practice-based reflection, feminist theory, and social movement studies*, the article will locate WISE Bulgaria as a living laboratory of how communities of care can emerge around material issues like energy poverty. It will link this to contemporary crises—ecological, democratic, and epistemic—and explore how feminist facilitation, storytelling, and social pedagogy turn “energy” from a technical problem into a social commons.

**Key words:** energy poverty, vulnerability and solidarity; feminist action research

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## ***Introduction: energy as a site of social imagination***

*Energy* is rarely discussed in relational terms despite, or probably because, its key role in the Just Green Transition frameworks. It appears instead as a matter of infrastructure, finance, or climate targets - measured in kilowatt-hours rather than care. Yet behind every policy target or efficiency index lies a more fragile and intimate reality: people struggling to stay warm (or cool in the summer), to cook, to care, to have sufficient light for homeworks with their kids. To exist with dignity. Across the continent, 8–10% of households are affected by energy poverty<sup>1</sup> or at least vulnerability<sup>2</sup>; among single women the rate surges to 31%, and among single mothers to 44%<sup>3</sup>. These are not abstract figures - they describe an entire social field in which gender, class, and infrastructure intertwine to produce both material deprivation and civic invisibility or hidden struggles.

The *Women in Solidarity for Energy (WISE)* project emerged precisely within this field of invisibility. Funded under the European Union's *Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV)* programme in the period 2024-2026, and implemented across seven EU countries, and co-funded in Bulgaria from the European Climate Foundation, it set out to make the energy transition more just, participatory, and gender-aware. Yet in the process of implementation, WISE became more than an awareness campaign. It unfolded as a *social intervention*, or is at least intended to be - in so far as we are at the threshold in Bulgaria of precisely moving into the stages of direct engagement of groups and individuals to build a laboratory of collective learning, feminist facilitation, and civic imagination. Under the leadership of the Orion Grid, the project in Bulgaria seeks not only to address the symptoms of energy poverty, but to reconfigure the very social relations through which energy, care, and at the end of the day democracy are lived.

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<sup>1</sup> Defined as "energy bills being an excessive share of income (e.g. >10%) and inability to maintain thermal comfort (winter or summer)". The definition of energy poverty employed by the project is not limited to the poorest households as in the official definition for policy purposes and budgets adopted in Bulgaria for the purposes of the Green Deal.

<sup>2</sup> Which we define "as being 1-2months away from not being able to pay energy bills if regular income is lost".

<sup>3</sup> Eurofound (2022), *The cost-of-living crisis and energy poverty in the EU: Social impact and policy responses – Background paper*, Eurofound, Dublin. Availableonline at: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/2022/cost-living-crisis-and-energy-poverty-eu-social-impact-and-policy-responses> (l.a. October 2025).



This article proposes to read WISE Bulgaria as a form of *applied social intervention* - a participatory process through which communities, institutions, and individuals co-create meaning and solidarity around a shared material crisis. The project's approach resonates with the claim made by Sarah Stein Lubrano that "the apocalypse isn't something you survive alone": survival, like transition, is always collective<sup>4</sup>. Through film screenings, storytelling workshops, multilingual translation events, and energy solidarity days, WISE enacted a pedagogy of connection. It invited women - often isolated, marginalised, or silenced - to appear as experts of their own experience and as political subjects in a broader European conversation about justice, energy, and belonging.

At stake in this article is not only an account of what the project achieved, but an exploration of what it *reveals* about the possibilities of social change in an age of intersecting crises. By reframing energy solidarity as both a feminist and civic practice, WISE Bulgaria challenges technocratic understandings of transition and reclaims the everyday as a site of resistance and re-imagination. Its gatherings - whether called "Party Against Apathy," the National Collective meetings, or the "28 Days of Language Solidarity"- operate as rituals of repair: spaces where knowledge, emotion, and action can recombine into what we might call *social energy*.

Seen in this light, WISE is not simply a project; it is a prototype of a movement still coming into being - a networked form of *European social imagination* that builds community power around the most elemental of needs: warmth, care, and voice.

So far, the Bulgarian phase of WISE has primarily focused on *intervening in the social environment* - mapping the landscape of energy injustice, convening diverse stakeholders, and cultivating a new language of solidarity that could hold together activists, policymakers, NGOs, possibly companies and first of all - ordinary citizens. Through these early interventions, the project has built the social infrastructure for what comes next. As it now enters its second half, WISE is poised to shift from analysis and awareness toward direct engagement with women in situations of energy poverty and

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<sup>4</sup> Sarah Stein Lubrano, "The Apocalypse Isn't Something You Survive Alone," *Substack*, July 11, 2025, <https://sarahsteinlubrano.substack.com/p/the-apocalypse-isnt-something-you> (l.a. October, 2025).

vulnerability. This next stage will link these women to volunteers offering practical support - such as energy-saving home improvements and literacy in managing bills - while also creating spaces for them to develop skills in self-organisation, storytelling, and collective advocacy.

In this sense, WISE Bulgaria moves from the *symbolic to the tangible*, from raising consciousness to redistributing capacity. The forthcoming activities aim hyper-ambitiously to transform the solidarity networks already seeded in earlier phases into living systems of mutual aid and participatory governance. By enabling as much as actually possible within the material conditions surrounding the project women to articulate their experiences publicly and to take part in bottom-up policy processes, the project aspires not merely to speak about vulnerability but to generate power from within it. This transition - from intervention in the environment to transformation through community - is where the political and pedagogical promise of WISE truly comes into view. Despite the project timeline, we are painfully aware that these are only the bare seeds of such a process. It is paramount that we at least achieved to lift these women and hope that the next decades will realistically bear the fruits.

***Theoretical framework: from energy poverty to energy justice to a new world***

Energy poverty has often been described in policy documents as a *technical problem* - a deficit of insulation, infrastructure, or affordability. Yet, as feminist and critical theorists remind us, material deprivation is never merely economic: it is relational, embodied, and political. What WISE brings into focus is precisely this relational dimension. Energy poverty is not just about cold homes; it is about whose labour keeps the home warm, whose voice counts in decision-making, and whose suffering remains unseen in the data tables.

The term *energy justice* thus marks an epistemic shift. It reframes energy not as a commodity, but as a commons of care, situating it within broader struggles for gender, social, and environmental justice. The fact that it has never entered commonsense and ordinary people when they encounter our project think we are referring to a life energy, the capacity to find



strength in a challenging world is beyond telling. Joan Tronto's ethics of care<sup>5</sup> provides one of the most resonant frameworks for understanding this shift: justice begins not with rules or redistribution, but with *attentiveness* to the lived needs of others and the capacity to respond in a humane manner. From this perspective, feminist energy justice is not only about decarbonisation, but about reweaving the social fabric that has been frayed by brutal austerity, privatisation, and the depoliticisation of everyday life.

Silvia Federici's notion of *reproductive labour*<sup>6, 7</sup> further clarifies the gendered dimensions of this struggle. Women, especially those in precarious or single-headed households, perform the invisible labour that sustains both families and communities under conditions of scarcity. Their unpaid work - cooking, heating, cleaning, caring - absorbs the systemic failures of energy markets and public policy. To speak of *energy solidarity*, then, is to make visible the hidden infrastructures of care that women already maintain, and to politicise them as sites of collective agency rather than private endurance.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the WISE methodology also resonates with Paulo Freire's idea of *conscientização* - the process by which oppressed groups develop critical awareness of their social conditions and act upon them<sup>8</sup>. In WISE workshops and events, women are not treated as beneficiaries but as co-producers of knowledge: experts of lived experience whose insights can reshape both local practice and European policy. Similarly, the influence of the Tavistock tradition<sup>9</sup> - visible in Orion Grid's facilitation practice - brings a psychosocial depth to the project: attention to group dynamics, meaning, projection, and emotional containment as necessary conditions for democratic learning.

Taken together, these frameworks invite a rethinking of energy not as a

<sup>5</sup> Joan C. Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Brooklyn, NY: PM Press, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary ed., trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> See A. K. Rice, *Learning for Leadership: Interpersonal and Intergroup Relations* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1965).

technical subsystem but as a field of social imagination. The move from *energy poverty* to *energy justice* requires not only structural reforms, but also new collective imaginaries - new stories about interdependence, vulnerability, and power. Sarah Stein Lubrano's reflection that "the apocalypse isn't something you survive alone"<sup>10</sup> captures this precisely: in an era of climate anxiety and social fragmentation, survival itself becomes a shared, narrative act. Energy solidarity, in this sense, is both material and symbolic - it provides warmth, but also meaning.

Through this lens, WISE Bulgaria can be seen as a critical theory and a feminist experiment in rebuilding social energy (or at least laying the seeds in for the decade to come): transforming private struggle into public solidarity, and local interventions into the seeds of a broader, transnational movement. The theoretical groundwork of WISE in Bulgaria is therefore not merely descriptive but generative - it models how social intervention can become a form of *collective world-making* within and beyond the European project.

Beyond its immediate material implications, the concept of *energy solidarity* carries a utopian and democratising potential. While its practical implementation remains constrained by political frameworks and institutional inertia, the idea itself gestures toward an alternative horizon of governance - one grounded in direct democracy, community empowerment, and collective stewardship of resources. Through energy solidarity, local communities can - in theory - evolve from passive consumers into active participants in decision-making, gaining direct control over their energy needs and, consequently, over their role in local governance.

Such a transformation holds the promise not only of democratizing the energy sector, but of cultivating a wider culture of self-organization and civic responsibility. It involves:

- Empowerment through *community ownership*, participatory monitoring, and shared control of resources;
- Building *resilience* through decentralized management;

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

- Nurturing a *democratic ethos* that prioritizes collective problem-solving, community well-being, and ecological balance.

By allowing citizens to *experience* the benefits of democratic energy governance, the energy field itself becomes a laboratory for democratic innovation - a place where people learn the skills, sensibilities, and values necessary for self-governance. These local practices of co-management and shared accountability can, in turn, expand into broader social and political movements, embodying what Michel Foucault termed a *heterotopia* - a space that operates according to different logics than the dominant social order.

In his essay "*Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*"<sup>11</sup>, Foucault describes heterotopias as "counter-sites" that offer alternative modes of living, thinking, and organizing. Energy solidarity projects as ours can be read potentially precisely in this sense: as heterotopic spaces of collective care, where communities assume responsibility for their own energy futures, privileging sustainability, cooperation, and reciprocity over profit. The example of the British company *Ecotricity* in the UK, while not immune to severe criticisms, illustrates this principle in practice: by involving citizens directly in decision-making, profit-sharing, and community events, it transforms the energy sector into a site of civic engagement and cultural renewal.

In these "other spaces," communities can at least in theory experiment with what might be called *counter-modernities of energy* - spaces of opposition and invention that challenge centralised, profit-driven infrastructures and in fact are capable through appealing to solidarity to transform them from within in the long run. They can function not only as technical innovations but as social rehearsals for democracy itself: arenas where cooperative ownership, distributed management, and participatory governance prefigure a more just and sustainable future. In this utopian vision, energy solidarity emerges as a transformative democratic practice - one that has the potential to decentralise power, strengthen communities, and give people a tangible stake in their collective destiny.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," *Architecture / Mouvement / Continuité* (October 1984), trans. Jay Miskowiec, <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf> (original lecture 1967).

### ***Methodology: the project as social intervention***

The WISE project in Bulgaria was conceived not merely as a programme of awareness raising, but as a **living social laboratory** - an evolving set of participatory practices designed to bridge the gap between structural injustice and everyday experience. Rather than treating “beneficiaries” as data points or recipients of aid, the project approached them as *co-producers of social knowledge, agents of change* and *trustees of the project* in their own right. This methodological orientation - deeply influenced by feminist participatory action research, process facilitation, and psychosocial group work - positions WISE, at least in Bulgaria, as a **social intervention** rather than a conventional development project.

At the core of this methodology lies the recognition that energy poverty is not an isolated condition but a *relational system* involving policies, infrastructures, domestic labour, societal structures and social hierarchies. Addressing it therefore requires interventions at multiple levels: individual, communal, institutional, decision- and policy making. WISE Bulgaria responded to this challenge through a layered participatory design, integrating research, learning, and activism that are light touch, low key and carry the potential for a significant impact. Each stage of the project - assessment, dialogue, storytelling, and practical solidarity - was intentionally constructed as both a site of inquiry and of transformation.

#### ***1. The architecture of participation***

The initial phase focused on *mapping the landscape of vulnerability* and *building an enabling environment*. Through the creation of the National Collective for Energy Solidarity comprising 12 other NGOs, Orion Grid brought together diverse stakeholders - grassroots women’s organisations, the emerging “Care” Coalition, architects, psychologists, local authorities, and lived experience experts. The Collective functioned so far as a promising microcosm of participatory democracy: a space where technical experts and marginalised citizens could think and act together across disciplinary and social divides.

Meetings were designed and facilitated using dialogical and group-analytic methods, drawing on the Tavistock tradition of process consultation. The



aim was to create what group theorists call a “*container*” - a psychological and social space capable of holding anxiety and complexity without collapsing into polarisation<sup>12</sup>. This method proved essential in a context where conversations about poverty, gender, and state neglect often evoke feelings of shame, anger, and resignation. By establishing safety and mutual recognition, the process itself became transformative: a rehearsal of the kind of society WISE seeks to build for our ambitious project of laying the foundations for the next - probably thousands - of years to come.

## 2. Villa Eighta: an inter-breath feminist infrastructure of care and political learning

To sustain these processes, Orion Grid repurposed a physical site - Villa Eighta - as both a workspace and a community hub. Far from being a logistical convenience, this decision was strategic and symbolic. The Villa embodied the project’s commitment to “infrastructures of care as a zone of political learning”: spaces intended to nurture reflection, hospitality, and shared responsibility while aiming to embed it in ways to interpolate eco-cultural identities by direct contacts with barking and swimming pets and the nature outside in the small backyard - birds, squirrels, trees, grass and plants<sup>13</sup>. It hosted meetings of the Collective, study groups, a lecture and planning sessions, while also offering a haven for facilitators, activists, and vulnerable women to connect beyond institutional constraints.

In this way, the Villa functioned as what Michel Foucault might call a *heterotopic site* - a place operating under different rules than the world outside, enabling participants to experience democratic practices in miniature. Decisions were aiming co-creation, snacks and beverages were shared

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<sup>12</sup> See Wilfred R. Bion, *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1961).

<sup>13</sup> In David Abram, *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), Abram develops “inter-breathing” as a metaphor for the reciprocity between the human body and the animate Earth — a perfect reference if we use it as a poetic-ecological image of social and planetary interdependence and how we are all connected throughout breath (living beings, habitats, nature and ultimately the climate). See also Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*, trans. Mobi Ho (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), “inter-being” and “inter-breathing” are seen as relational ontologies — breathing as the act that connects all beings — which fits in the Orion Grid’s spiritual and ethical use within the idea of solidarity and shared life. See also Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), where Nancy uses the idea of “*partager le souffle*” — the shared breath — to describe community as a continuous act of co-existence, resonating with your reading of WISE as collective social energy.

collectively, and discussions were facilitated rather than structured to ensure equality of voice. The material and affective dimensions of this environment were integral to the methodology: the warmth of the space, the shared food and beverages, and the informal conversations between sessions often proved as meaningful as the formal agendas and even more so.

### **3. The "Party Against Apathy": method as ritual**

A good example of the WISE methodology in practice was the event titled "Party Against Apathy." Held in April 2025 in Sofia, it combined video screenings, speeches, and facilitated group dialogues to mobilise reflection through art and collective experience. The event drew activists, human rights defenders, and citizens affected by energy poverty into an afternoon and an evening that was at once festive and analytical, emotional and political. By integrating visual storytelling with the World Café discussion format<sup>14</sup>, the event hopefully blurred boundaries between knowledge, experience and emotion, learning and celebration.

This deliberate synthesis transformed participation into a ritual of solidarity: films acted as mirrors of lived experience; small-group dialogues created intimacy across difference; the shared vegan meal prepared by one the members of our growing community reasserted the eco-social dimension of energy itself. The method did not seek consensus but *resonance* and *ripples* - the recognition that diverse experiences of vulnerability and even privilege in some ways could coexist within a common framework of dignity and justice. The "Party Against Apathy" thus exemplified WISE's central methodological principle: that social change is not transmitted through information but *generated through encounter and entanglements*<sup>15</sup>.

### **4. From environment to embodiment**

Having established the enabling ecosystem, the project now moves into a new methodological phase - direct engagement with women in energy

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<sup>14</sup> Juanita Brown and David Isaacs, *The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007) as well as Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2003): 801–831.



vulnerability. This transition marks a shift from *intervening in the environment* to *co-creating embodied practices of solidarity*. Upcoming activities will link women to trained volunteers who can assist with low-cost home improvements, provide energy-saving literacy, and support participation in self-organised advocacy groups. Parallel workshops in storytelling and democratic dialogue will help participants translate private experience into collective voice, creating an archive of narratives that can inform policy from the bottom up.

This iterative methodology mirrors a cycle familiar to feminist action research: *reflection–action–reflection*<sup>16, 17, 18</sup> as well as Kurt Lewin’s approach<sup>19</sup> of *unfreeze -change- refreeze*<sup>20</sup>. Each intervention is treated as an experiment in learning, where outcomes are measured not only in outputs but in transformations of awareness, relationships, and agency. The process thus generates what can be described as social energy - a renewable resource of trust, creativity, and solidarity that sustains both participants and institutions.

### ***5. The project as a bridger and an enabler: ethics of facilitation***

Underpinning all of this is a strong ethical orientation. The facilitators, drawn from Orion Grid’s team and evolving network of psychologists, educators, action researchers and activists, adhere to principles of non-hierarchical knowledge exchange, confidentiality, and collective accountability. Facilitation is treated not just as a specialised psychoanalytically informed skill but as a feminist craft that intertwines emotional labour with political consciousness. It seeks to balance structure with openness, ensuring that every participant - regardless of education, age, or status - has access to

<sup>16</sup> Patricia Maguire, *Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach* (Amherst, MA: Center for International Education, University of Massachusetts, 1987).

<sup>17</sup> Marja-Liisa Swantz, Rachel Smith, and Orlando Fals-Borda, eds., *Participatory Action Research in Practice: Challenges and Possibilities* (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Patti Lather, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern* (New York: Routledge, 1991) where Lather reframes the “reflection–action–reflection” cycle through post-structural feminist critique, emphasising knowledge, power, and reflexivity.

<sup>19</sup> Kurt Lewin, *Field Theory in Social Science: Selected Theoretical Papers*, ed. Dorwin Cartwright (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

<sup>20</sup> We are hopeful that despite the financial crisis currently threatening the project, after setting up a strong community of vulnerable women nested in a space contained by other organisations, an emerging pan-European movement and a wider environment driven by curiosity and care, there will be at the end something meaningful to “freeze” as a new status quo.

the shared process of meaning-making. In doing so, WISE contributes to what might be termed a *pedagogy of solidarity*: a form of democratic learning rooted not in abstraction but in lived interdependence.

Through this multi-layered approach, WISE Bulgaria redefines methodology itself as a political practice. Its interventions do not aim merely to “collect data” or “raise awareness,” but to *rehearse futures* - to construct temporary spaces in which alternative ways of living, knowing, and governing can be tried, felt, and refined. In this sense, WISE in Bulgaria stands not only as a project within the energy transition, but as a microcosm of transition: aiming a shift from alienation to participation, from scarcity to reciprocity, from isolation to shared power.

### ***Discussion: constraints, contradictions, and the practice of time***

Every social intervention unfolds within conditions that both enable and constrain it. WISE Bulgaria has illuminated not only the transformative potential of energy solidarity, but also the *temporal and structural pressures* that shape its practice. For many participants - including NGO professionals, facilitators, and especially women in precarious conditions - engagement itself becomes a form of labour squeezed into an already overburdened day.

In Bulgaria, where salaries remain the lowest in the EU and civil sector and social services are chronically underfunded, the very women whom WISE seeks to empower often inhabit an impossible temporality: juggling paid work, unpaid care, emotional labour, and parenting - frequently as single mothers - while being asked to participate in civic advocacy and policy dialogue. This tension reveals a paradox of contemporary activism: solidarity demands time, yet time itself has become a scarce resource, privatized and unequally distributed.

Even within supportive networks, coordination becomes an exercise in endurance. A telling example came when, for three months, a family of volunteers - a mother, father, and daughter - offered to help with practical repairs at Villa Eighta: changing light bulbs, sealing windows, cleaning the climate unit to reduce bills. Despite shared commitment, it took months



to align schedules, to carve out a single day when everyone could be present. When that day finally arrived, the act of *working together* transcended utility; it became an occasion for *bonding and belonging*, a modest yet profound enactment of solidarity. The experience underscored a simple truth: one cannot “jump in” to community - connection itself takes time.

There are also ideological resistances. During a walk outside of formal meetings, a single mother and participant in the project as an expert by experience confided her frustration: *“I cannot stay in the project, nothing personal to you at all- I deeply respect you and your work. But they tell us to limit our consumption, to make ourselves smaller, to give up the comfort of a long shower after a hard day - while we all know what they do to the forests in the Amazon.”* Her words encapsulate a widespread sentiment: that the rhetoric of responsible citizenship often disguises asymmetries of power and guilt, shifting the moral burden of sustainability onto those with the least agency to change systemic injustice. For many, energy solidarity cannot mean and should not mean further self-denial - it must mean redistribution and accountability from above.

At an institutional level, the challenges are equally tangible. The EU funding architecture itself reproduces precarity among the very civil-society actors it claims to support. Under the CERV programme, the funding is not only just a contribution to a wider funding organisations are somehow expected to obtain under a shrinking civil space and disappearing funding, but the final 40% of funding is released only after the project’s completion and bureaucratic approval, leaving small, newly established but vibrant NGOs such as Orion Grid exposed to cycles of debt and uncertainty. The paradox is sharp: the organisations most capable of fostering grassroots empowerment are structurally disempowered by financial mechanisms that privilege stability and liquidity—precisely the resources they lack.

And yet, within these constraints lies a paradoxical empowerment. By navigating these complexities - by surviving and persisting (as yet of this moment of time) - Orion Grid alongside stronger partners have entered the European stage as mediators between policy discourse and lived experience. Through its work, the project has given voice to groups and individuals long excluded from the technocratic vocabulary of energy transition. It

has demonstrated that even under precarious conditions, solidarity can be practiced not as a utopian abstraction but as a daily negotiation between care, exhaustion, depletion and courage.

### ***Conclusion: toward a politics of social energy***

The story of WISE Bulgaria as of now is, but also at the end of the day, a story of scale - of how small acts of repair and reflection resonate within large structures of power. By reframing energy as a matter of justice and relation, the project has created spaces where women, activists, and professionals could *feel* the possibility of democracy, however fleetingly. It has shown that social transformation does not occur in simply the grand gestures of policy, but in the modest, repeated acts of coordination, listening, and mutual care that keep communities alive.

In this sense, the true measure of WISE's impact may not lie in its deliverables or metrics, but in the *social energy* it has and will hopefully generate - a renewable resource of trust, creativity, and resilience. The project stands as both critique and prototype: a critique of the extractive logics that shape not only the energy sector but civil society itself, and a prototype for new forms of collective power grounded in feminist ethics, democratic learning, and the slow, patient work of building community.

Energy solidarity, as to be practiced in Bulgaria (and already practiced among us the growing community of the Orion Grid), is thus not simply about fighting for basic comforts or efficiency. It is about trying to reclaim the capacity to *imagine and organise* together - to fight to turn scarcity into connection, and precarity into purpose.

WISE targets low-income single women, single mothers, elderly women, and migrant women, who are generally more socio-economically vulnerable, which increases their risk of living in energy poverty. The project aims to raise awareness of energy justice and provide opportunities to participate in the development of policies to eradicate energy injustice. Project activities include developing and disseminating accessible content in Bulgarian on fair energy policy, fundamental energy rights, and rational energy use, as well as - and we are at the beginning of this stage - organis-



ing public events and mobilizing collective action at the local and national levels. Orion Grid's aim with this project is to stimulate civic participation, support the empowerment of vulnerable people and communities, and increase solidarity on issues and problems related to energy poverty and a just energy transition.