

Viladecans residents can now get electricity through Vilawatt

The Viladecans public-private energy company is now up and running, a project chosen and funded by the EU through the Urban Innovative Actions

The Catalan company Aura will supply the electricity, after winning the call for tenders under the project

Viladecans (29 July 2019) – Viladecans residents can now get their electricity through Vilawatt, the city's public-private energy company. The first 11 residents already signed up last week. They were the founding members of the Citizen Association for the Energy Transition (Asociación Ciudadana para la Transición Energética). This new association was created in order to push towards the energy transition, create a new energy culture, and do so in an innovative fashion. The people's implication and participation throughout the process is a necessary part of the Vilawatt project. So, it was necessary to set up an association of residents. In doing so, the company offered founding members the opportunity to be its first customers.

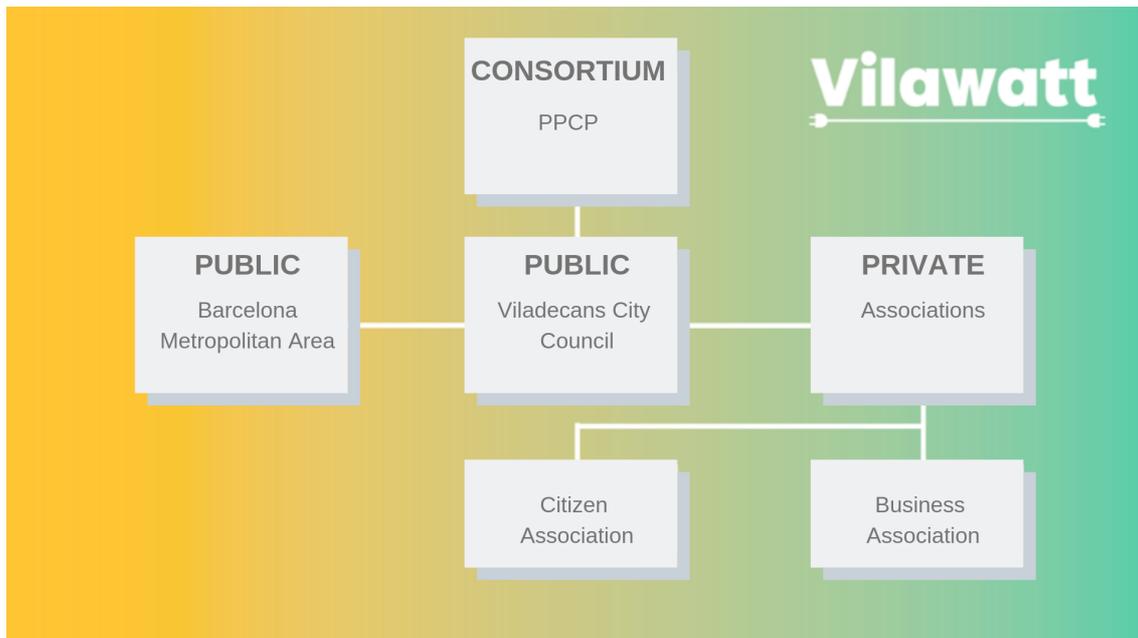
A European project started in 2016

Given the government of Viladecans' firm commitment to fighting climate change, in 2016 the team was seeking a way to ensure energy was managed in a more efficient manner, focusing on the environment and fighting climate change, and the ability to fight energy poverty. These concerns gave rise to Vilawatt, an integrated energy operator with a joint structure that includes residents, companies and the City Council, as well as a second public institution.

In November 2016, an initiative of the European Union to fund innovative projects proposed by cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants addressing global challenges with solutions that had never been tested before (UIA Initiative) chose this project from a total of 378 proposals as one of the 18 to receive funding in the energy transition arena. Projects in Paris (France) and Gothenburg (Sweden) were also selected. As a result, Vilawatt is receiving €4.2 million in funding, in addition to the €1.1 million provided by the Viladecans City Council, to develop the project that has now become a reality with the creation of the Vilawatt company.

How is Vilawatt organised?

Vilawatt is organised through a public-private-citizen partnership made up of the Viladecans City Council, the Barcelona Metropolitan Area and, since last week, the Citizen Association for the Energy Transition. An association of retailers and businesspeople will be joining the PPCP shortly. The legal constitution of the Public Consortium allows two or more public administrations and associations of individuals to participate in the same directive body. Currently, the City Council holds 90% of the rights and obligations of the Consortium, while the super municipal body (AMB– Barcelona Metropolitan Area) holds the remaining 10%. These percentages will change as new stakeholders join the partnership, such as citizens' bodies and business organisations. The Viladecans City Council will gradually hand over part of its holdings to the new members as they join.



The Citizen Association for the Energy Transition

The individuals that get their energy through Vilawatt must also be members of the Citizen Association for the Energy Transition. This way, they will be members of the company and have a say in its future. The Association operates just like any other regulated citizens' body: governed by bylaws and with an 11-member Board of Directors, including a president, secretary, treasurer, positions that must each be held by a different person. Members of the

Association can participate actively in the General Assembly, by either putting forward proposals or voting. They also have the right to be elected as members of the board, if they have enough support.

100% renewable electric energy

The ecological transition of Viladecans requires a company that thinks green. So, the Vilawatt company provides 100% renewable electric energy, meaning it comes from clean and inexhaustible resources that can be regenerated naturally (such as hydraulic, solar or wind energy). It is also green, because it is obtained through processes that do not emit any substances that have a negative impact on the environment. In short, the perfect combination to fight climate change.

All of this is done through collective energy buying from Aura Energía, a company certified to provide green, renewable energy that won the public tender (which was open to any companies that met these standards) carried out by the City Council. Aura Energía is certified to two ISO environmental standards: 14001: 2014, which ensures the activity is managed in a way that ensures proper eco-friendly behaviour, and 9001: 2008, which ensures it applies a series of guidelines put together through international consensus on Good Management Practices.

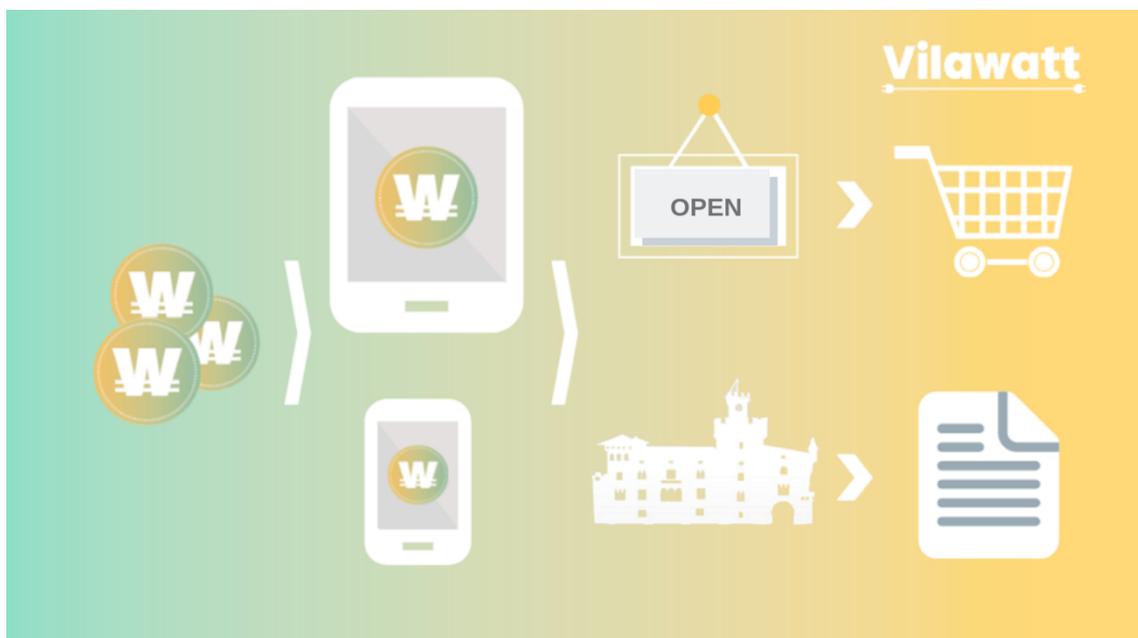
Collective energy buying

With Vilawatt, we pool the demand for energy of all the users and buy electricity wholesale. Through collective buying, we are a single customer buying from the supplier, which makes us a much bigger client that buys much more electricity and we can, therefore, negotiate better prices and services. Municipal buildings are also included in this collective buying group.

A currency to encourage the circular economy

Residents that get their electricity through Vilawatt are rewarded with the new currency. When they sign up to get their energy through Vilawatt, they also sign up for the new local currency: the Vilawatt. Part of the savings each customer sees through collective buying, over spending with their previous company, is reinvested into the project (for example, to refurbish homes) and the other part is given back to participants in the Vilawatt currency, which can be used at local businesses.

The Vilawatt currency is a local, complementary digital payment system for payments between individuals, organisations, retail establishments, businesses and public administrations. It is local because it can only be used in Viladecans. And it is complementary because it doesn't aim to substitute the Euro; it is used in addition to it. It has the same value as the Euro and does not replace it. It is a complementary system that helps build loyalty to participating retail establishments in Viladecans, boosting sales in both the local currency and in Euros. It is a digital currency and payments are done via transfers from one account to another. This can be done on a smartphone or tablet, using the Vilawatt app (available for iOS and Android, for download on the municipal website). Vilawatt will be legally secure, with all necessary legal and financial guarantees.



An instrument for energy refurbishment of buildings

The Vilawatt programme also offers other services, including energy refurbishment of buildings, which helps Viladecans along its path towards the ecological transition. Improving the conditions of a building and its energy efficiency reduces the power used and takes advantage of renewable energy, helping cut greenhouse gas emissions, which means residents are more comfortable at home while consuming less, and improving insulation, making residents more comfortable in terms of temperature and noise, improving their quality of life. Plus, it helps cut energy use. Over the course of the Vilawatt project, €1.4 million has been

invested in the comprehensive energy refurbishment (active and passive refurbishment measures) of three residential buildings.

Another service is to provide guidance helping residents implement saving measures and more sustainable lifestyle models. Vilawatt provides several guidance spaces to help users save energy and think green. Here, participants can get advice on their light and gas bills, explaining what they are being charged for and how they can lower them (contract electricity, hours, etc.).

The programme also offers energy audits of homes. It is important to note that older buildings use five times more energy than new builds. Putting in EIFS insulation systems, new windows or, even, thicker curtains can make homes more comfortable while using less energy. Vilawatt offers residents an audit service to detect what investment can be made to make the home more energy efficient.

Furthermore, the Vilawatt Space for the people has been up and running for some months now, acting as a meeting and learning space that is open to everyone. More than one hundred residents have come to the space to learn basic concepts of energy and how to manage it better. The sessions are free and held monthly at the Casal de Barrio Montserratina at 6:30 pm. The Vilawatt Blog is also up and running, with tips and guidelines for analysis and a newsletter.

A push in training

To make the city more energy-efficient, experts in assessment, execution and trends in energy refurbishment are required. To this end, the Vilawatt programme has created a training proposal that addresses these needs.

The course, offered free of charge, is level 3 with 920 teaching hours. It provides participants with tools to assess the energy efficiency of building installations, collaborate in energy certification of buildings, and determine the feasibility of projects to install solar thermal energy. It also qualifies them to promote efficient use of energy in buildings and offer efficient energy practices in buildings.

For more information: www.vilawatt.cat