

Rui Beon



The European Union has set ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% (from 1990 levels) by 2030, with 32% of energy generated from renewable sources in the same timeframe. It's a target that renewable industry trade association, SolarPower Europe, believes can be easily met with the aid of solar power. They believe that demand for solar power is set to reach 15GW per year in Europe, but manufacturing and installation capacity may hinder the potential of the technology.

Portuguese solar technology start-up BeOn Energy is tackling the challenge head on. Created by electrical engineer Rui Beon in 2015, the company aims to make it easier, faster and cheaper for people to install solar panels on their property. They do this by turning a solar panel into a home appliance, therefore bypassing many of the complex and disruptive work required to plug solar panels into the energy system of the property. Instead, it allows the technology to be plugged directly into a standard plug socket, just like any common home appliance, and feed into the property's electricity system from there.

BeOn Energy is one of two EIT-supported companies offering installations that can be safely plugged into a wall socket. BeOn believes that such simplicity can be hugely important in democratising access to renewable energy and encouraging people to install solar energy on their property.

'We created a new product that can be installed safely by any person, just as you can with other household appliances, such as a fridge or microwave,' Beon says. 'It's a huge breakthrough in the democratisation of solar energy, as anyone who can afford a fridge or television can now afford their own solar energy system.'



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Website:
beonenergy.com



Twitter:
twitter.com/BeONenergy



Country:
Portugal



Innovation Community:
EIT InnoEnergy

Scaling up

As one of the leading start-ups in Portugal, the company was identified as a suitable candidate by EIT Climate-KIC. The impact of working with the EIT has been immediate, with the EIT 'seal of approval' already proving invaluable when attempting to validate both the company and the technology to potential partners, investors and customers.

Beon hopes that as the partnership develops, there will be a number of exciting opportunities to work on pilot projects with the various utilities and energy companies that are part of the EIT Community network.

'A lot of our work with utilities starts with a pilot project, but the value we bring to customers is often quickly evident and there is a mutual desire to then scale things up,' Beon says. 'We have a multitude of technologies that we'd like to bring to the market, but we need support to help get pilots started, and to then scale up successful projects from there.'

While a lot of initial work has been done in Portugal and the Iberian Peninsula, Beon believes that the cost-effectiveness, flexibility and durability of the technology renders it something that can be viable throughout Europe and further afield.

Growing a Business

The company began in the heart of the financial crisis, and this had a profound effect on the culture at the company in those early days. With access to finance limited, Beon implemented a clear hacking culture that was born out of his engineering-based past. If circumstances were different, however, it's not necessarily a route he would take again.

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'Join an accelerator that can guide you through the process of finding investors, preparing business plans, building the team and preparing the basics for the journey ahead,' he urges entrepreneurs today. 'And of course, many of these will recommend joining programmes such as EIT Climate-KIC for the tremendous networks and validation they offer to the start-up.'

It's an ecosystem that he believes is growing throughout Europe, with support for start-ups flourishing across the continent. While accelerators and incubators multiply, however, access to finance remains something that could be spread across Europe more effectively.

'I think now, every European country has a well-developed ecosystem, but the investment sector is still excessively concentrated in a few countries, which means Europe lags behind America and China in terms of quantity and size of investment in start-ups,' he explains. 'If Europe wants to be a leader in innovation, then it needs to improve faster than other regions around the world, as everyone is striving to innovate.'

If it can manage to funnel that support to the start-ups solving the most pressing challenges facing society today, then Europe stands a good chance of meeting the ambitious climate change targets it has set.

