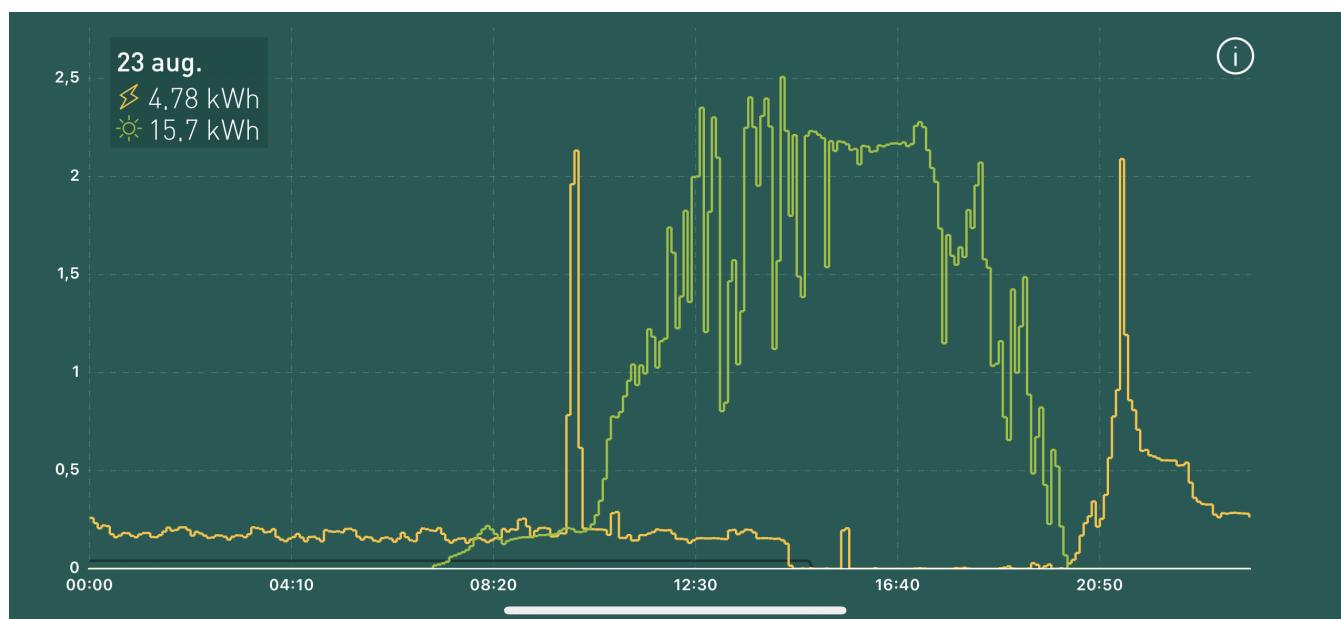


# Setting up a home energy monitoring system

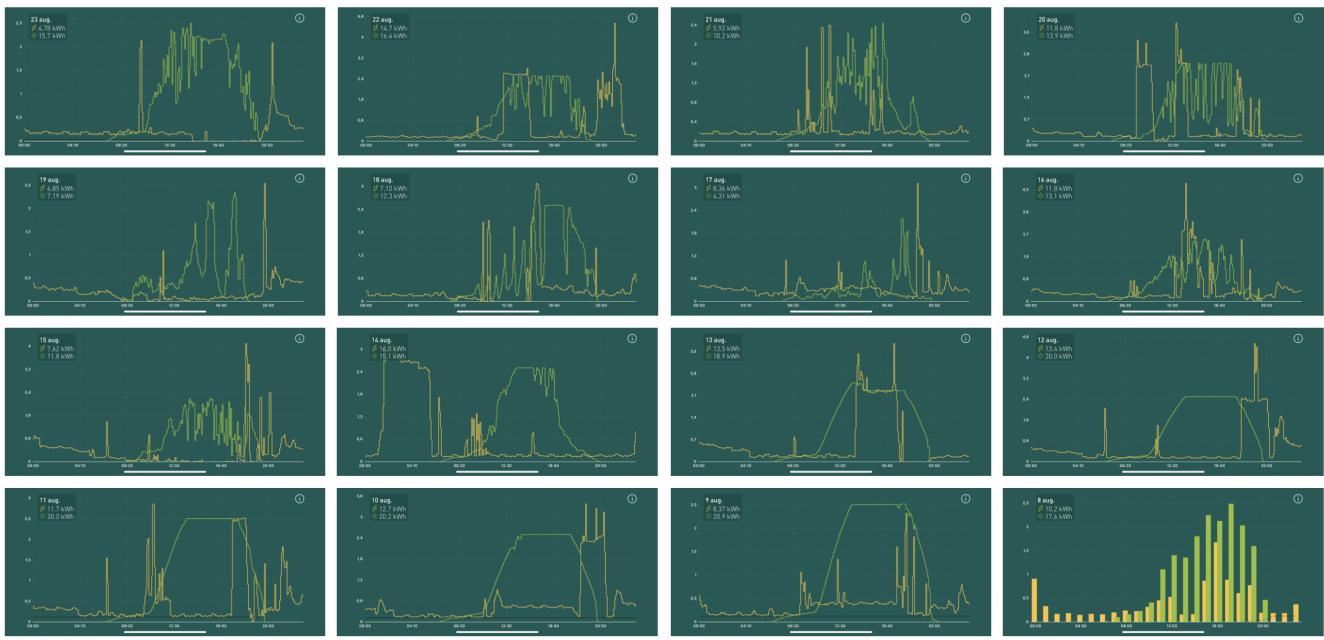
## Introduction

We had been using a *Smappee* system that came with our solar panel installation at home for about two years. It was installed back in July 2020 to monitor the electricity generation and consumption in our house when I noticed something odd. I used the neat *Smappee* iOS app to check the five-minute averages to monthly averages of the energy generated by the solar panels on our roof. The system was tracking granular numbers for longer than two weeks until it abruptly changed it to two weeks.

To illustrate the issue, let's look at a couple of sample plots. The first one is an example of 5 minute average production and consumption data for one day (August 23, 2022):



The next one shows the same graphs over a period of 16 days (from August 8th till August 23rd):



The graph shows the granularity changes from 5 minutes to an hour on August 8th.

The obvious question I asked myself was how to keep granular data longer, and I saw two options. First, I could ask the company behind the system to reinstate the longer data retention period. Second, I could investigate if I could build an energy monitoring system that would allow me to configure the data retention policy as I wished it to be. I chose option two, as it seemed to give me an opportunity to learn technologies I had never used before.

Before I found out about the data granularity issue, I had already discovered that the *Smappee* energy management system was quite open. It provides two ways to get access to the collected data. One method is to use the *Smappee* REST API, the other is to use [MQTT](#).

The REST API can query endpoints in the *Smappee* Cloud, linked to an individual *Smappee* monitoring system located, for example, in one's house. Use of the API is free for non-commercial use and requires setting up [OAuth2](#) authentication.

When using [MQTT](#), the *Smappee* monitoring system configuration has to be tweaked to point to a so-called *MQTT Broker*. Once that's done, the *Smappee* device will send measurement samples at a once per second interval to the *MQTT Broker*.

The first access method polls data from the *Smappee* Cloud, while the second pushes data to a server.

With all this in mind, let's consider the project goals I set for my Home Energy Monitoring System (*HEMS*).

## Project objectives

The primary aim of the *HEMS* project was to collect *Smappee* data at specific aggregation levels and retention periods. Also, we want dashboards that display selected aggregates over a chosen time period.

For example, a *Smappee*, when configured to send data to an *MQTT Broker* sends data at a one-

second interval. One may want to aggregate this data at minutes, days, weeks, or months intervals. Each aggregation level may have specific data retention periods. For example, we may keep the high frequency 1 minute aggregates for a few months. On the other side of the spectrum, we may keep indefinitely the monthly averages (and obviously, as long as storage capacity permits).

As I wanted to be independent of external factors (such as the *Smappee Cloud*) as to not be exposed to the whims of external parties, I chose the *MQTT* route for building my *HEMS*.

Next to the already cited main objective, there were other objectives I wanted to achieve:

- If possible, implement the system without any programming.
- Use *Open Source Software* (OSS) only.
- Capture all knowledge gained in building the system as to make it easily reproducible.
- Simplify installation with automation.

We'll evaluate project objectives in the upcoming chapters.

## A brief introduction to *Smappee*

*Smappees* come in different versions of which I currently have two at home:

The first one, a *Smappee Solar* came with the solar panel installation and measures the total electrical power consumption of the house and the output power of the solar panels on the roof of the house. The second one is a modular *Smappee Infinity* that consists of:

- a *Smappee Power box* that powers all connected *Smappee* devices and that measures line voltage(s). It supports both mono-phase and tri-phase power systems.
- a *Smappee Genius* which is the brain of the system. This device implements Wifi and physical Ethernet connectivity and acts as a Gateway.
- one or up-to 7 *Smappee CT Hubs* that each can measure current in up-to 4 electrical circuits.

The *Smappee Power box* powers the *Smappee Genius*, which is connected to the daisy chained *CT Hubs* via [RS-485](#), using 4-wire twisted pair cables. These cables serve two purposes. First, they transfer power to the different *Smappee* components. Second, they form the communication channel between the *Smappee* components.

As mentioned in the introduction, a *Smappee* performs measurements at a 1 Hz rate. The *Smappee genius* measures:

- Mains frequency (Hz) and mains voltage(s) (V)
- Circuit currents (A)
- Real Power (W), Reactive Power (VAR), Apparent Power (VA), and Power factor

The *Smappee Solar* is a scaled down version of the *Smappee Infinity* system optimised for Solar panel installations.

Even though the physical installation is best performed by a professional, anyone with basic IT

skills can do the configuration.

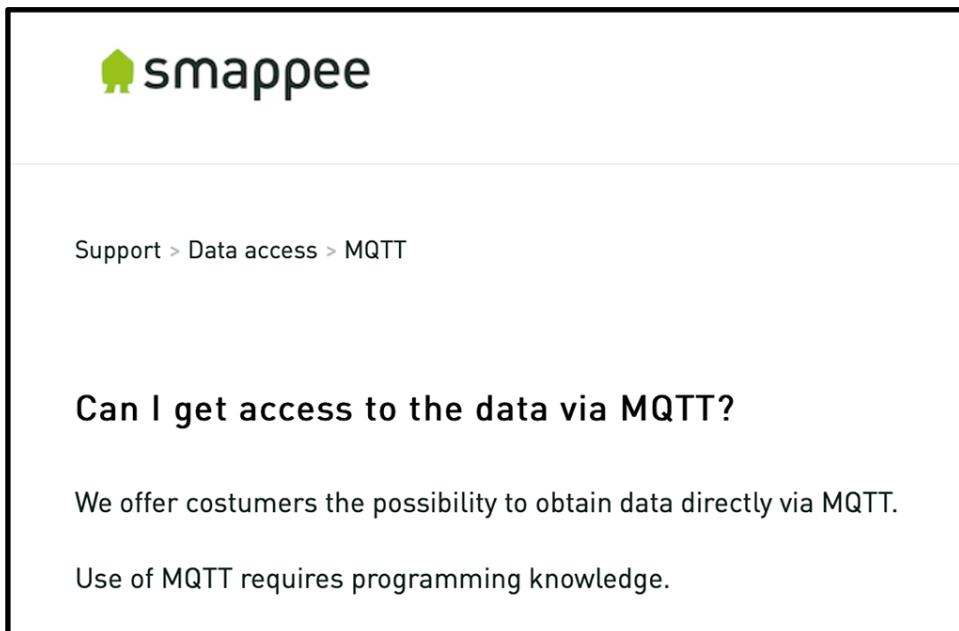
I've had the *Smappees* in service for 3 years (*Smappee Solar*) and 9 months (*Smappee Infinity*) and both have proven to be very reliable and accurate systems.

# HEMS Architecture & Implementation

## Architecture

As mentioned in the introduction, I opted for *MQTT* as a means to access the *Smappee* data measurements.

The *Smappee* documentation says the following about using *MQTT*:



The screenshot shows a section of the Smappee documentation titled "Can I get access to the data via MQTT?". It includes a note that customers can obtain data directly via MQTT and a warning that using MQTT requires programming knowledge.

**Support > Data access > MQTT**

**Can I get access to the data via MQTT?**

We offer costumers the possibility to obtain data directly via MQTT.

Use of MQTT requires programming knowledge.

"Use of MQTT requires programming knowledge."

Interesting, and unexpected, so worth investigating.

The HEMS system needs to have the following components:

- A Time-Series database that will store aggregated measurements with an optional data retention time.
- A Display server that will offer various dashboards. The latter can be displayed using a web browser.
- An *MQTT Broker*. It acquires raw measurements from *Smappee* and offers them to subscribers.
- The raw *Smappee* measurements are most likely not in a format that is suitable to write to the time-series database as-is. We may want to only keep data we're interested in and drop other stuff. Also, it is likely that we want to rename certain data fields. Therefore, we need a component that:
  - Subscribes to topics on the *MQTT Broker*.

- Transforms and aggregates the raw measurements.
- Writes it to the Time-series database.

Let's call the last component the *IO/transformer/aggregator*.

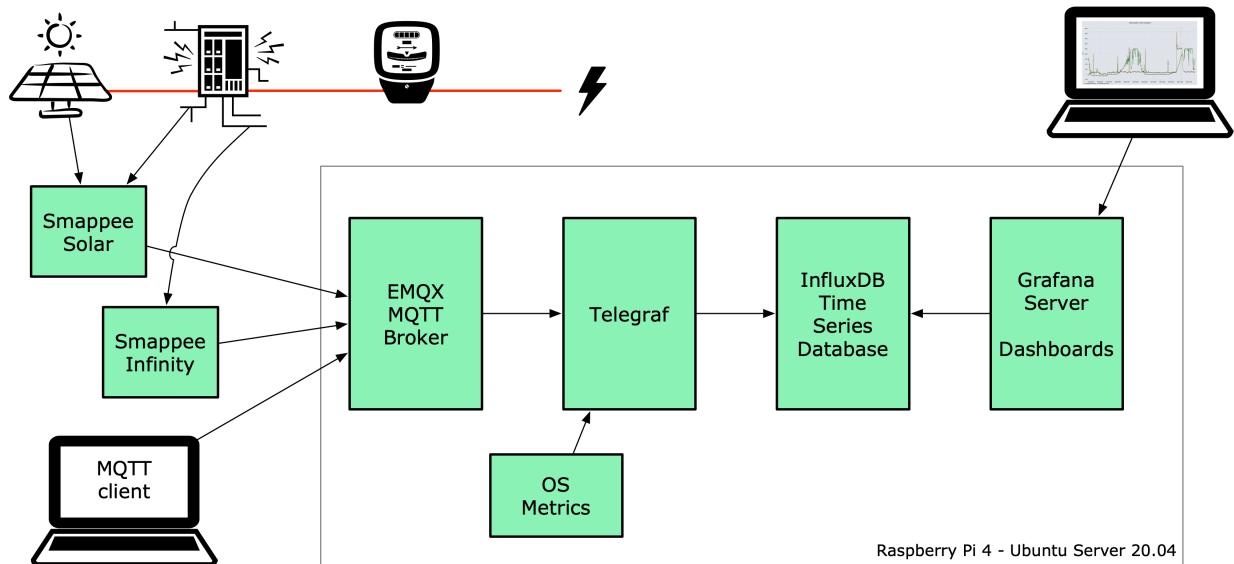
## Mapping of the architecture to specific components

Various alternatives exist for each component mentioned earlier, but I selected these (OSS) implementations:

- Time Series Database: [InfluxDB](#)
- Display server: [Grafana Server](#)
- *MQTT Broker*: [EMQX](#)
- *IO/Transformer/aggregator*: [Telegraf](#)

I used a Raspberry Pi with Ubuntu Server Operating System to run these components as I have great experience with this combination.

The following diagram shows the overall set-up of the *HEMS*:



Let's walk through the elements in this diagram one by one.

### The electricity system

The electricity system in the house is comprised of:

- A connection to the electricity grid and depicted as a lightning bolt.
- An analog electricity meter. Note that this meter measures actual power and it will turn backwards when the energy production is higher than the consumption.

Note: in Belgium, all domestic consumers will be required to have a digital electricity meter by January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025. This means that Fluvius, the company in Belgium that is responsible for tracking energy consumption, will have access to real-time meter readings and electricity consumption and injection can be billed separately.

## The Smappee systems

- A *Smappee Solar* that measures total energy consumption and total solar energy production.
- A *Smappee Infinity* that measures energy consumption of individual electrical devices or groups thereof. Examples of the former are the electrical furnace and dish washer. Wall sockets are grouped already and are an example of the latter.

## The Home Energy Monitoring System

- A Raspberry Pi 4 Model B/8GB with a 250GB SSD (SATA disk connected to one of the Pi's USB-3 ports via a USB-SATA converter).
- The software components — EMQX MQTT Broker, Telegraf, InfluxDB server, and Grafana Server with data flowing from left to right.
- An *MQTT* client — mainly used during debugging the *MQTT*/Telegraf configuration. The EMQX project has an *MQTT* client with a Graphical User Interface named [MQTTX](#), but due to it being pretty slow, I switched to [Mosquitto](#) CLI.
- I added the Raspberry Pi OS Metrics Telegraf configuration and Grafana Dashboard to monitor the Raspberry Pi.

With this out of the way, let's look at configuration and system provisioning in the next chapters.

# System provisioning

It is a well-established fact that the Internet provides a wealth of information about setting up IT infrastructure and software. Obtaining accurate and up-to-date information can be a challenge though.

For example, take the *absolutely great* [Raspberry Pi Grafana dashboard](#) developed by Jorge de la Cruz. I installed and configured this component before tackling the energy monitoring part. When I added the latter, the Raspberry Pi monitoring dashboard stopped working. An analysis showed that the Telegraf configuration for the Raspberry Pi system monitoring was too generic and had to be tweaked.

Another challenge I faced was determining what software component versions are supported by a particular operating system. As I am using Ubuntu Server OS, two versions, 20.04 and 22.04 were suitable candidates, with a preference for version 22.04. Unfortunately, at the time I installed the system, EMQX was only supported on 20.04, which made 22.04 a no-go (at the time of writing [EMQX on Ubuntu 22.04](#) is supported and I'm already running it on a test system).

A way to avoid having to go through a debugging cycle when provisioning a system is to use tools to automate the process as much as possible. Various alternatives exist, but I went for [cloud-init](#).

As Ubuntu Server bundles *cloud-init*, we can use it to our advantage. We can provision a new system in a reproducible way, and we can do so in the fastest way possible. Compared to a manual installation and configuration, at least an order of magnitude faster. We can provision the *HEMS* system in the time span of about 12 minutes. SD card flash time is consuming a sizable fraction of the total time.

In fact, after having gone through several iterations, I found out that we can optimise it further. Even though Ubuntu 20.04 doesn't support booting of an external SSD, it still does so provided that there's a bootable SD card installed on the Pi. The net effect is that the SD card needs to be flashed just once and only the SSD needs to be re-flashed. Given that it takes about 18 seconds to do this, we shortened the provisioning process down to 7 minutes!

Ubuntu 22.04 supports direct booting of an external SSD obviating the need to have an SD card installed on the Pi.

I plan to upgrade my current production system to the latest and greatest somewhere down the line. Have a look at [Future work](#) for a list of ideas.

## Configuring MQTT on the *Smappees*

We can configure a *Smappee* to send its measurements to an *MQTT Broker* in the advanced configuration menu of the *Smappee*. For this configuration, we need the IP address of the broker and the port number it is listening on (default = 1883).

The following screenshot shows the advanced configuration screen of a *Smappee*.

Advanced config parameters	Setting
Webportal password	[REDACTED]
Active power lower limit (color green->yellow)	0
Active power upper limit (color yellow->orange)	0
MDNS hostname	Smappee11070075
MQTT local broker (e.g. tcp://192.168.0.48:1883)	tcp://192.168.68.201:1883
MQTT local broker username	[REDACTED]
MQTT local broker password	[REDACTED]
Switch 5 minute read delay	0

**Apply changes and restart monitor**

Note that the configuration set the broker's IP address to 192.168.68.201, the port number to 1883, and the transport layer communication protocol to TCP.

With that configuration change, each *Smappee* will now start sending *MQTT* data to the broker.

Note that we will lose data if the configuration is incorrect (e.g. wrong IP address or port number). Also, if the broker is down or unreachable, data will be lost.

MQTT sends data on so-called *MQTT topics*. Different options exist for encoding the actual data, but *Smappee* opts for JSON encoding.

The structure of the data is different between the *Smappee Solar* and the *Smappee Genius*. Let's start with the Solar and then look at the other.

```
$ mosquitto_sub -h 192.168.68.201 -p 1883 -t servicelocation/f960f45d-c43b-4937-a8d0-ce1869206011/realtimed | jq
{
  "totalPower": 255,
  "totalReactivePower": 251,
  "totalExportEnergy": 0,
  "totalImportEnergy": 807413694,
  "monitorStatus": 0,
  "utcTimeStamp": 1683799083538,
  "channelPowers": [
    {
      "ctInput": 1,
      "power": 1175,
      "exportEnergy": 6848910,
      "importEnergy": 884498523,
      "phaseId": 1,
      "current": 49
    },
    {
      "ctInput": 2,
      "power": 255,
      "exportEnergy": 0,
      "importEnergy": 807413694,
      "phaseId": 2,
      "current": 15
    }
  ],
  "voltages": [
    {
      "voltage": 241,
      "phaseId": 0
    }
  ]
}
```

On this device, the data we're interested in are the line voltage (`voltages/voltage`), the two power readings (`channelPowers/power` for `channelPowers.ctInput = 1` and `channelPowers.ctInput = 2`), and the timestamp of the measurement. We will explain later how this data is extracted and transformed before writing it to InfluxDB.

For the *Smappee Genius*, the (abbreviated) data looks as follows:

```

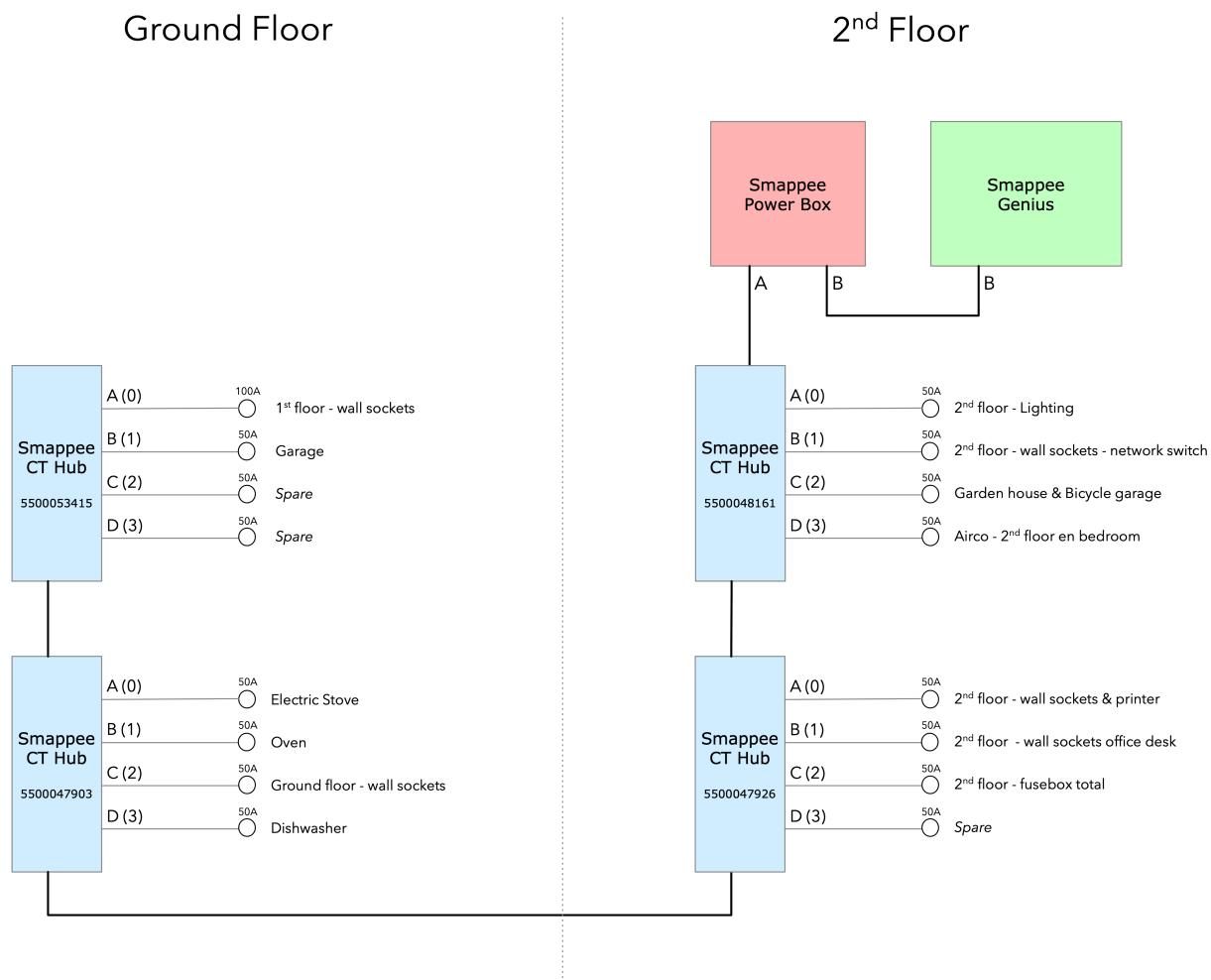
$ mosquitto_sub -h 192.168.68.201 -p 1883 -t servicelocation/5aaf6e89-89cb-4e33-bf34-05abc62f5563/realtimed| jq
{
  "totalPower": 0,
  "totalReactivePower": 0,
  "totalExportEnergy": 5900400,
  "totalImportEnergy": 3332883600,
  "monitorStatus": 0,
  "utcTimeStamp": 1683799714000,
  "measuredFrequency": 49983008,
  "channelPowers": [
    {
      "publishIndex": 0,
      "formula": "$5500053415/0$",
      "power": 84,
      "exportEnergy": 2188800,
      "importEnergy": 280227600,
      "phaseId": 0,
      "current": 4,
      "apparentPower": 90,
      "cosPhi": 93
    },
    {
      "publishIndex": 1,
      "formula": "$5500053415/1$",
      "power": 7,
      "exportEnergy": 900000,
      "importEnergy": 277783200,
      "phaseId": 0,
      "current": 1,
      "apparentPower": 21,
      "cosPhi": 33
    },
    <elided>
  ],
  "voltages": [
    {
      "voltage": 242,
      "phaseId": 0
    },
    <elided>
  ]
}

```

The *Smappee Genius* collects more information than its smaller sibling. Observe the `measuredFrequency` measurement (expressed in  $\mu\text{Hz}$ ) which allows us to track the mains AC frequency, `channelPowers.cosPhi`, measures the so-called **Electrical Power Factor (also known as  $\cos(\phi)$ )** or power factor on a per channel basis. Interesting to note is the presence of the *CT Hub* Id and channel number in the `channelPowers.formula` value. This Id is a 10-digit number that uniquely

identifies each *CT Hub*.

The following diagram shows the physical configuration & measurement points on the *Smappee Infinity* system.



We recognise the four *CT Hubs* with their respective Id and what each *CT Hub* channel measures. The labels *Ground Floor* and *2nd Floor* at the top of the diagram refer to the location of the fuse panel in which the *Smappee* components are located.

Now that we know the message format of the raw data published via *MQTT*, we will look at how we can get the messages into the Time series database.

## Configuring Telegraf

Telegraf offers a series of plugins that fall into four categories: *Input*, *Processor*, *Aggregator*, and *Output*. Telegraf plugins that are relevant to our use case are:

- Input: [MQTT Consumer](#) and the [JSON v2 parser](#). The JSON v2 parser is a generic component that can apply to any input plugin.
- Aggregator: [Basic Stats](#)
- Processor: [Regex](#)
- Output: [InfluxDB v1.x](#)

## Reading and transforming the MQTT data sources

Our two *Smappees* send data to the *EMQX MQTT* broker located at `tcp://192.168.68.201:1883`. Let's look at the relevant part of the Telegraf configuration for the *Smappee Genius*.

```
[[inputs.mqtt_consumer]]
  alias = "smappee-2"
  name_override = "smappee-data-2"
  servers = ["tcp://192.168.68.201:1883"]
  topics = [
    "servicelocation/5aaf6e89-89cb-4e33-bf34-05abc62f5563/realtimed"
  ]
  # The "host" tag is irrelevant in this use case. Drop it
  tagexclude = ["host"]
  data_format = "json_v2"
[[inputs.mqtt_consumer.json_v2]]
  [[inputs.mqtt_consumer.json_v2.field]]
    path = "channelPowers.#(formula==$5500048161/0$).power"
    rename = "zolder-verlichting"
    type = "float"
  [[inputs.mqtt_consumer.json_v2.field]]
    path = "channelPowers.#(formula==$5500048161/1$).power"
    rename = "zolder-stopkontakten-network-switch"
    type = "float"
  [[inputs.mqtt_consumer.json_v2.field]]
    path = "channelPowers.#(formula==$5500048161/2$).power"
    rename = "tuinhuis-fietsgarage"
    type = "float"

<elided>
```

We are configuring the `mqtt_consumer` input plugin and point it to connect to the *EMQX* broker. The `topics` setting is used to instruct the plugin to subscribe to the *MQTT* topic of interest. Next, the `name_override` setting is used to name the stream of data elements produced by the input plugin. This name is used to select the desired route that the data will follow as other plugins process it. Finally, the data is in JSON format (`json_v2`) and we exclude the host field.

We're ready to configure the JSON parser, which is done in the `inputs.mqtt_consumer.json_v2` configuration section. For each field in the data that we want to retain for further processing, there's a section that selects the field, renames it, and specifies its format.

You may wonder how one knows the syntax of the `path` selector. A very handy tool for this is the [GJSON playground](#) which allows one to try out queries on JSON data. It comes with examples for the most important use cases.

Here are two examples of queries on the *Smappee Genius* data. These respectively extract the `measuredFrequency` value and the `power` value for channel 0 on the *CT Hub* with Id `5500053415`.

The screenshot shows the GJSON Playground interface. At the top, the title "GJSON PLAYGROUND" is displayed in large blue and black letters. Below it, a sub-header states "GJSON provides a fast and simple way to search a JSON document." A search bar at the top contains the query "measuredFrequency". The main content area shows a JSON object with several fields, including "channelPowers": [ ... ]. A specific element within this array is highlighted with a red box, showing its details: "publishIndex": 0, "formula": "\$5500053415/0\$", "power": 22, "exportEnergy": 2188800, "importEnergy": 283021200. Below this, the value "50014256" is shown in a dark box. The entire interface has a clean, modern design with a light gray background.

```
{
  "totalPower": 0,
  "totalReactivePower": 0,
  "totalExportEnergy": 6026400,
  "totalImportEnergy": 3359401200,
  "monitorStatus": 0,
  "utcTimeStamp": 1683883854000,
  "measuredFrequency": 50014256,
  "channelPowers": [
    {
      "publishIndex": 0,
      "formula": "$5500053415/0$",
      "power": 22,
      "exportEnergy": 2188800,
      "importEnergy": 283021200,
    }
  ]
}
```

50014256

The screenshot shows the GJSON Playground interface. At the top, the title "GJSON PLAYGROUND" is displayed in large blue and black letters. Below it, a sub-header states "GJSON provides a fast and simple way to search a JSON document." A search bar at the top contains the query "channelPowers.#(formula==\$5500053415/0\$).power". The main content area shows a JSON object with several fields, including "channelPowers": [ ... ]. A specific element within this array is highlighted with a red box, showing its details: "publishIndex": 0, "formula": "\$5500053415/0\$", "power": 22, "exportEnergy": 2188800, "importEnergy": 283021200. Below this, the value "22" is shown in a dark box. The entire interface has a clean, modern design with a light gray background.

```
{
  "totalPower": 0,
  "totalReactivePower": 0,
  "totalExportEnergy": 6026400,
  "totalImportEnergy": 3359401200,
  "monitorStatus": 0,
  "utcTimeStamp": 1683883854000,
  "measuredFrequency": 50014256,
  "channelPowers": [
    {
      "publishIndex": 0,
      "formula": "$5500053415/0$",
      "power": 22,
      "exportEnergy": 2188800,
      "importEnergy": 283021200,
    }
  ]
}
```

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## Transforming the MQTT topic

If we would limit the Telegraf configuration to what we have up to now, the data would be tagged with the rather lengthy topic (`servicelocation/5aaaf6e89-89cb-4e33-bf34-05abc62f5563/realtim`e). It makes sense to drop the `servicelocation` and the `realtim`e parts. We can do this using the `regex` processor by adding the following configuration.

```

[[processors.regex]]
namepass = ["smappee-data-2"]
[[processors.regex.tags]]
key = "topic"
pattern = ".*/(.*)/.*"
replacement = "smappee/${1}"

```

We can observe:

- By specifying the `namepass` setting, the processor will only apply to the data we want to transform. If we would leave it out, the transformation would be applied on *all* data.
- We select the `topic` key and apply a pattern match on its value via a regular expression which captures the value of the second field.
- The original topic value, `servicelocation/5aaf6e89-89cb-4e33-bf34-05abc62f5563/realtim`, is replaced by the new value `smappee/5aaf6e89-89cb-4e33-bf34-05abc62f5563`.

## Aggregating the data

Writing the measurements at the *Smappee* 1Hz sample rate is overkill, so we want to aggregate measurements at a longer interval. I kept average values over 1-minute intervals. We can implement this using the `basicstats` Telegraf aggregator plugin.

Here's the configuration for this:

```

[[aggregators.basicstats]]
namepass = ["smappee-data-2"]
## The period on which to flush & clear the aggregator.
period = "60s"

## If true, the original metric will be dropped by the
## aggregator and will not get sent to the output plugins.
drop_original = true

## Configures which basic stats to push as fields
stats = ["mean"]

```

The usage of the `namepass` setting should be familiar by now. Other than that, we set the aggregation interval to 60 seconds (setting `period`) and we drop the original (1 second) measurements as we only want the plugin to calculate the average value via the `stats` setting.

We could also choose to let Telegraf handle further aggregation to longer intervals, but that's a task that is better left to InfluxDB as the latter will also help us to specify data retention times.

All that's left to do is to write the data to the Time series database.

## Writing the processed data to InfluxDB

An InfluxDB server is running on the same host (<http://192.168.68.201:8086>). The only thing missing is the Telegraf InfluxDB output plugin configuration:

```
[[outputs.influxdb]]
namepass = ["smappee-data-2"]
alias = "smappee-out-2"
urls = ["http://192.168.68.201:8086"]
database = "smappee_monitoring_2"
username = "this is not my username"
password = "this is not my password"
```

This configuration is for InfluxDB version 1. We should not pass the database username & password in the config. I will revisit this as part of a future migration to InfluxDB version 2, which has a completely revised security implementation.

## Lessons learned from setting up Telegraf and InfluxDB

### Telegraf - message routing through plugins

The Telegraf plugin system is powerful, but it took me quite some time to wrap my head around its configuration. Even though there are video tutorials and online courses on various Telegraf related topics, it took me a lot of time to grasp how data is routed through the system by applying the `name_override`, `namepass`, and `namedrop` parameters. When it finally dawned on me how it works, it looked trivial (and it actually *is*).

### Telegraf - plugin application order

The order of application of Telegraf plugins is:

- *Input* plugins
- *Processor* plugins
- *Aggregator* plugins
- *Output* plugins

For *Processor* plugins, we can tweak the order of execution by setting the `order` parameter on all processors involved.

The [Telegraf configuration document](#) is worth reading and provides a lot of very useful information that you may want to read before embarking for the first time on a Telegraf project.

### Telegraf - conclusion

The *HEMS* has a relatively simple Telegraf configuration. The configuration can be put in a single file (`/etc/telegraf/telegraf.conf`), or across multiple files located in the `/etc/telegraf/telegraf.d` folder. An advantage of using multiple configuration files is that the configs for different *Smappee* systems can be separated. In fact, when I recently added some *Zigbee 3.0* devices that connect to a

*Zigbee2MQTT* bridge configured in a Home Automation system, its Telegraf configuration was stored in a dedicated file. One thing to be aware of is that using multiple configuration files doesn't introduce any separation between the individual configs, so treat it as if everything was stored in a single file.

A cool feature of Telegraf is that a configuration file can be generated by the Telegraf CLI for a given list of Telegraf plugins. This configuration includes all possible settings applicable to the chosen plugins.

I think that in a complex system, it's challenging to maintain the Telegraf configuration(s). InfluxDB version 2 probably has features that simplify managing this, but that's something I haven't explored yet.

## InfluxDB

Installation and configuration of InfluxDB version 1 is simple. I automated the installation using *cloud-init*, including the creation of the user databases & user account.

I spent little time securing the set-up as I think InfluxDB version 2 has a lot more to offer.

Actually, when I started this project, I wasn't aware of the fact that there is a version 2 of InfluxDB. I found out by the time the project was already long underway. I did a small trial by uninstalling version 1 followed by an installation of version 2. What I found impressive is that when I started the version 2 instance for the first time, it told me it had detected version 1 databases and if I wanted them converted to version 2. I accepted the offer and it worked flawlessly. What I liked even more is that when I reverted the installation to version 1, my original data was still there and ready to continue where I left off. Pretty impressive, if you ask me.

## Provisioning the *HEMS* system with *cloud-init*

*cloud-init* is a method for cross-platform instance initialisation. We can utilise it even on bare-metal installations like on a Raspberry Pi. It performs user creation, can execute custom scripts, installs packages, creates files, partitions disk, creates file systems, etc.

It used to have rather poor documentation, but this is a thing of the past. When you want to start with *cloud-init*, have a look at the [Cloud Config Examples](#) which should get you started quickly. These examples are part of the [Reference Documentation](#) on the [cloud-init website](#).

## Using *cloud-init*

I started using *cloud-init* many years ago on another Raspberry Pi project. Back then, I used the *Hypriot* operating system (a derivative of [Raspbian](#)) which has integrated support for *cloud-init* and *Docker*. The Hypriot OSS project has gone dormant for a few years, but one of the contributors pointed out that Ubuntu Server has the same goodies incorporated. I switched to Ubuntu and never looked back.

A *cloud-init* deployment is driven by a cloud-config file in YAML format. You can find the configuration for this project [here](#). It's part of the *HEMS* GitHub repository that also contains the Telegraf configuration [smappee-2.conf](#) for the *Smappee Genius* and [smappee.conf](#) for the *Smappee*

*Solar.*

Noteworthy mentioning is that *cloud-init* supports instance data with [jinja] template rendering. Instead of directly applying configuration settings in the *cloud-config* file, metadata comprising key/value pairs can be passed to *cloud-init* in a file and these can be de-referenced in the *cloud-config* file.

For the Ubuntu *cloud-init* installation, I adapted the *Hypriot* [flash](#) command supports passing in the metadata file during flashing. You can find this version [here](#).

Here's an example invocation of the command to flash an SSD (or SD) with Ubuntu 22.04

```
$ flash -n home-iot -j -m cloud-init/meta-data -u cloud-init/smappee-2.yml \
https://cdimage.ubuntu.com/releases/22.04/release/ubuntu-22.04.2-preinstalled-
server-arm64+raspi.img.xz
```

## Conclusion

The [Project objectives](#) set at the start of the project were all achieved.

No programming was required to build the *HEMS*. All software components are OSS, and we can provision a new *HEMS* system in a matter of minutes in a reproducible way.

Apart from provisioning the *HEMS*, the only thing that needed to be changed was to configure the *Smappees* to send their data to the *MQTT Broker*.

Finally, and that's about the only manual step, we configure Grafana data sources and import Grafana dashboards.

## The Grafana Dashboards

Up to now, this article has focussed on the *HEMS* implementation. Let's shift to the Grafana dashboards I created and the insights these give into the energy production and consumption in the house.

### The Energy production and total Energy consumption dashboard

The *Smappee Solar* measures energy production, total consumption, and the mains voltage. This brings us to the first Grafana dashboard that displays this information in a couple of panels, as shown here:



The six status panels at the top display the following information:

- Total solar energy generated over the selected time period in kWh.
- Average Solar power generated in kW over the last minute.

- Total energy consumption over the selected time period in kWh.
- Average total energy consumption in kW over the last minute.
- Mains voltage minimum and maximum value over the select time period in Volts.
- Mains frequency in Herz (this value is measured by the *Smappee Genius*).

Next up are three line graphs showing one minute average values for:

- Electricity production and total consumption
- Power budget
- Power import

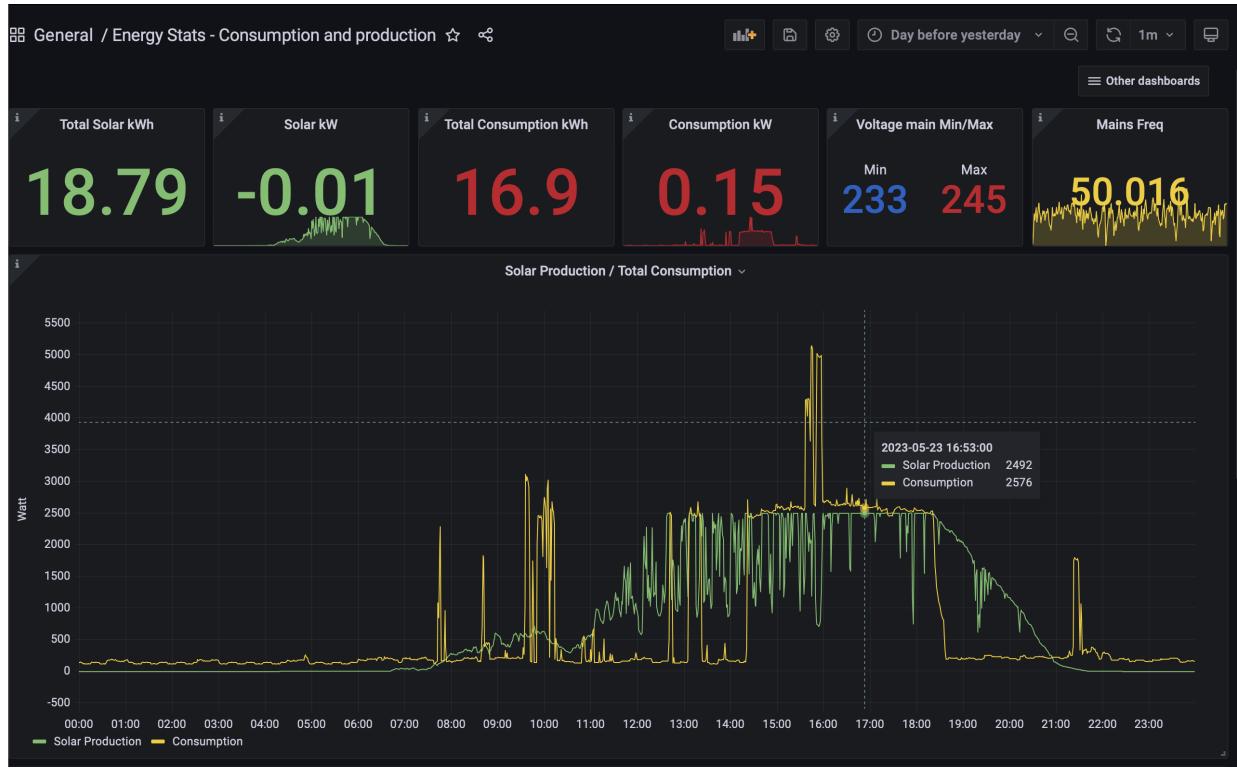
The last two graphs display values that are not directly measured, but that are derived in Grafana from the data displayed in the first graph.

Even though the installed Solar panel capacity is about 4 kW, the production capacity is capped to 2500W by the lower rated power of the inverter attached to the panels.

The Grafana dashboard allows us to quickly answer questions like:

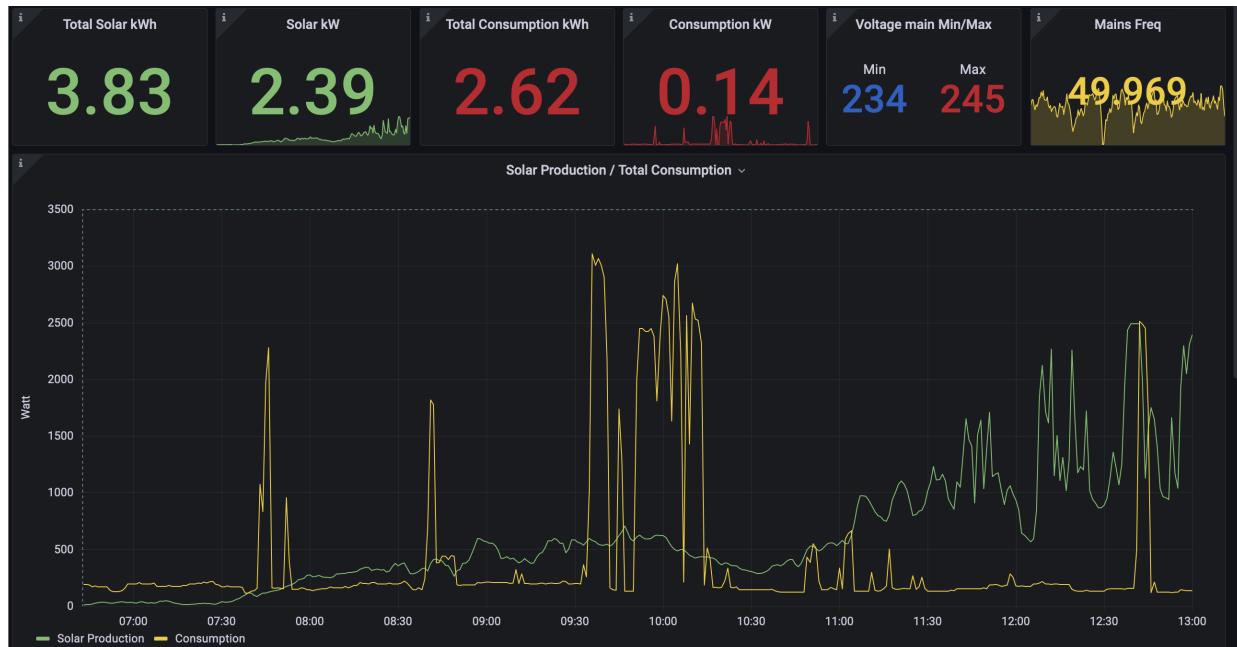
- What is the total amount of energy produced by the solar panels?
- What is the peak power produced by the solar panels?
- What is the total amount of energy produced by the solar panels during ramp-up in the morning till 13:00?
- What is the total amount of energy produced by the solar panels for the remainder of the day?

The top-left status panel tell us that the answer to the first question is 18.79 kWh. The second question is answered by hovering over the first graph during a moment at which maximum output is generated:



The answer is 2492W, which corresponds to the rated power capacity of the installed inverter.

We can answer the other two questions by zooming in on the selected time spans in the dashboard. We can then read the values in the first panel on top of the dashboard. Let's see what this gives.





So, total production during ramp-up is 3.83 kWh whereas a total of 14.96 kWh is produced after 13:00.

These answers can be obtained in a matter of seconds whereas doing the same from *Smappee* would require one to download the raw data from the *Smappee Cloud*, import them in a spreadsheet to calculate the desired values. This would not only be a hassle, but it would also take way more time.

Let's now look at the Power budget and Power import graphs. These represent the following data:

- The Power budget is the difference between the generated power and the consumed power at a particular point in time. This value is non-zero if the former is larger than the latter, otherwise it is zero. So, this graph can tell us how much extra, non-utilised power the Solar panels generate over time. It can be considered a budget, hence the name Power budget. If we can store this energy, we can use it at a later time when we consume more than what is produced.
- The Power import graphs is the sibling of the Power budget graph: it tells us how much more power would be needed to cover the total power usage in the house.

We can observe in the Solar Production / Total Consumption graph that there's a steady consumption of about 2400 W between 14:20 and 18:20. This is actually the charging of the battery of a hybrid car. Even though quite a lot of energy is generated by the Solar panels, it is not sufficient to cover the full load of all consumers in the house. This can be seen from the Power budget and Power import graphs.

Unfortunately, these graphs are not that straightforward to generate, as the query language doesn't have the required functions to do the calculation in a simple way. There's no `max` (maximum) function that would allow us to calculate the Power budget values like this:

```
PB = max(solar_power - consumption_power, 0)
```

There is an `abs` (absolute value) function though that allows us to obtain the desired value as follows:

$$PB = (\text{solar\_power} - \text{consumption\_power} + \text{abs}(\text{solar\_power} - \text{consumption\_power}))/2$$

A bit contrived, but it does the job. Still, what we can't compute in Grafana is the total Energy budget and the total Consumption Import values (both in kWh). This is due to the limitation of the Grafana `sum` function that doesn't take computed values such as `PB` as argument. Still, it would be extremely useful to have these values. I plan to explore some alternative solutions for this after migrating to InfluxDB version 2.

## Solar production numbers over a day

Let's return to the Grafana dashboards. Here's another question: imagine a day with no clouds in the sky. On such a day we would have a maximum amount of energy generation by the solar panel installation. What is the ratio between the energy generated during the ramp-up phase in the morning, the steady-state phase, and the ramp-down in the late afternoon? Let's find such a day in the logged data and then get the answers in the same way as we did above.

Let's zoom out a bit:



Well; it's not been very sunny this spring, but it seems that April 19<sup>th</sup> may be a good candidate...



Ok, not perfect, but good enough as the total production that day was almost 20 kWh.

Repeating the process to select the appropriate numbers, we get:



The amount of energy produced in each section of the production curve is 4.21 kWh, 12.75 kWh, and 2.97 kWh. When we express this as relative to total production number, we get the following ratios:

- Ramp-up: 21.1%
- Steady state: 64.0%
- Ramp-down: 14.9%

The beautiful thing about this is that this exploration and calculation takes just a minute to complete.

# The "Energy Stats - Consumer details" dashboard

This dashboard shows total energy consumption for all the measurements taken by the *Smappee Infinity* system (see the [Smappee Infinity connection diagram](#)).

It allows us to answer questions like:

- What was the total energy consumption of:
  - the air-conditioning system last month?
  - the charging of the hybrid car's battery last winter?
  - cooking fresh tomato sauce from the 15kg of tomatoes we bought the other day?

Ok, the last example is a bit far fetched but possible nevertheless and it's a great topic to kickstart a conversation about energy (and cooking)!

The graphs can also tell us some interesting things like:

- How does the power consumption of the air-conditioning system evolve between start-up and the reaching of a steady state?
- How does the power used to charge the battery of a car or electrical bicycle evolve during a charging cycle?

**TODO:** add graphs to illustrate the above.

# Electrical Power Factor (also known as $\cos(\phi)$ )

The Power Factor is a measure of an electrical system's energy utilisation efficiency. The power consumption can be decomposed in three parts:

- $P_a$ : Apparent power, which is the product of the measured voltage and current.
- $P_{\text{real}}$ : Effective- or Real Power is the part that actually produces work in the broad sense of the word, it's not the internal efficiency of the device itself. For example, an incandescent lightbulb consuming 100W converts 98W to heat and only 2W to light. So, in this case, the Productive Power is 100W (this is not to be confused with the efficiency of that bulb which is 2%).
- $P_{\text{reactive}}$ : Reactive power (VAR - Volt-Ampère-Reactive) which is the part that doesn't perform any work, but that still results in energy flowing between the electricity producer and consumer.

The relation between these components is the following:

- $P_a^2 = P_{\text{real}}^2 + P_{\text{reactive}}^2$
- $P_{\text{real}} = P_a \cdot \cos(\phi)$
- $P_{\text{reactive}} = P_a \cdot \sin(\phi)$

(If you're interested about the theory around this topic, read [this article](#) about it.)

In electrical systems,  $\cos(\phi)$  is a value between 0 and 1. When the reactive power is 0,  $\cos(\phi)$  is equal to 1 and  $P_a$  and  $P_{\text{real}}$  have equal values.

On the other extreme,  $P_{\text{reactive}}$  is equal to  $P_a$ , and  $P_{\text{real}}$  and  $\cos(\phi)$  are both 0.

Both the real- and the reactive power components transfer energy between energy producer and consumer. The real power component corresponds to a unidirectional transfer of energy from producer to consumer. The reactive power component corresponds to energy being bounced back and forth between producer and consumer.

If we look at the bigger picture, both are transferred through the grid via high voltage transmission lines, transformers, and local power distribution systems. During this transfer, losses occur amounting to 6% to 8% of the total energy produced.

Companies that produce and sell electricity want the reactive power to be 0 or as small as possible compared to the apparent power. This is because, in principle, the transmission losses generated by the reactive power aren't billable to consumers. With the explosion of battery powered devices that use chargers such as mobile phones, laptop computers, electric bicycles, and electric cars, this poses a real challenge as these supplies may exhibit a poor  $\cos(\phi)$ . Regulations are being put in place to force manufacturers to address this issue.

When measuring the  $\cos(\phi)$  of various equipment in the house, I noticed that the charger in the electrical car has a  $\cos(\phi)$  that is pretty much equal to 1, which means that it exhibits close to perfect behaviour. This is especially important as the power consumed during the charging is in the order of multiple kilo Watts. On the other hand, the charger of our electrical bicycle charger's  $\cos(\phi)$  is only 0.69. So, when charging, the different powers are  $P_{\text{real}} = 180\text{W}$ ,  $P_a = 260\text{VA}$ , and  $P_{\text{reactive}} = 187\text{W}$ . Even though it's "only 187W", when thousand or millions of devices with a low Power factor

are online, the impact *is* significant.

**TODO:** add an illustration from the relevant dashboard with a more detailed analysis that show that the power factor of the car's charger is ~0.995

# Future work

- Upgrade of the production system without any loss of data
  - Upgrade Ubuntu 20.04 to Ubuntu 22.04
  - Upgrade InfluxDB v1 to InfluxDB v2
- Add pricing and electricity cost data to the system
  - Add dashboards that display the price of electricity imported from (and exported to) the grid over a specified period and for specific consumers
  - Add dashboards that display cost data such as day-ahead prices and that calculate the actual cost of power consumption (or the money received as a result of injecting electricity into the grid)
- Actively control electricity consumption to:
  - Reduce peak consumption
  - Drive down the electricity bill by shifting consumption to moments where the prices are lower. Candidate consumers are electrical water boilers and electric cars

# Glossary

- W Watt is the metric unit for Power which is equal to 1 Joule/second
- kWh kilo Watt hour is a unit for energy. It is the total amount of energy that is consumed by a device that consumes 1 kW during 1 hour.  $1 \text{ kWh} = 1,000 \text{ Wh} = 0.001 \text{ MWh}$  (Mega Watt hour)
- VAR: Volt-Ampère-Reactive, a unit of so-called reactive power. It's just a unit of power, but as it is used to characterise the reactive power component in an AC system, it's not expressed in Watts.
- VA: Volt-Ampère, a unit of so-called apparent power.