

Deckblatt

**Ideenwettbewerb „EnergieCampus“ der Stiftung Energie & Klimaschutz zum Thema:
„Wie geht Klimaschutz morgen“**

Einreichung:

People vs. Windfarms? - To what extent are strategies for public participation used to foster social acceptance in the European wind energy sector?

Von

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People vs. Windfarms? – To what extent are strategies for public participation used to foster social acceptance in the European wind energy sector?

Abstract für den Ideenwettbewerb „EnergieCampus“ ausgerichtet von der Stiftung Energie & Klimaschutz Baden-Württemberg zum Thema „Wie geht Klimaschutz morgen?“

For the EU to meet its 2020 climate and energy targets, increased renewable energy generation and extensions to electricity infrastructure are necessary. Wind is the most mature of the existing renewable energy technologies. It is expected to play a fundamental role in achieving the EU 2020 climate and energy targets. Moreover, beyond 2020, wind energy is the key technology in all EU energy scenarios (Energy Roadmap 2050 of the European Commission, 2011). Generally speaking, European citizens are in favour of wind energy (Eurobarometer 2007, Eurobarometer 2011). They also support the EU goal of moving away from conventional electricity generation towards renewable power. However, on a local level, project developers are repeatedly confronted with criticism and opposition by the public (Wind Barriers 2010). This lack of public support contributes to the fact that over 20 % of wind energy projects are delayed and nearly 20 % are seriously threatened due to appeals (Windbarriers 2010). Therefore, dealing with social acceptance¹ of wind energy infrastructure is a necessity for all stakeholders involved in wind energy projects. Implementing public participation and engagement strategies into project management for onshore wind energy farms is often seen as a promising strategy to avoid and solve these aforementioned challenges. Thus it is important to (1) assess the current state of knowledge available to implement social acceptance strategies in the onshore wind sector and (2) to analyse to what degree such strategies form a part of wind farm projects and how successfully they are implemented in Europe today by project developers and other players such as local or regional authorities.

In order to assess the status quo of acceptance strategies a survey was conducted in 13 European countries. The sample includes 207 respondents from administrative bodies, project developers, environmental organizations, financial institutions, cooperatives and others active in the field of wind farm development.

¹ Acceptance is a general evaluation, that is, the extent to which people (dis)favour a particular energy alternative (cp. Perlaviciute and Steg 2014).

The results of the survey show that the majority of the survey participants have experienced stops or at least delays of projects due to a lack of social acceptance. Furthermore, the total number of reported negative public reactions towards wind energy development was much higher than the reported positive reactions. These findings underline, as expected and already shown by the Wind Barriers project (Wind Barriers 2010), the relevance of social acceptance issues to the onshore wind sector. This seems to already be common knowledge in wind farm project development as two thirds of the respondents claim that elements of public participation and engagement are part of the usual procedure during planning, building and operating wind farms. While many respondents report that integrating elements of public engagement is obligatory in their country, the percentage of those who claim that it is part of usual project management is even higher. This indicates that it is the usual case to go beyond what is mandatory.

Public participation measures, like involvement of the community in the design process, shared ownership, and community benefits were all perceived as helping to foster social acceptance across all respondent subgroups. The problems of these approaches were also mentioned. In the case of shared ownership for instance the risk of dividing the community between those who are affluent enough to purchase shares and those who are not. The main challenge related to community benefits was the need for careful implementation in order to avoid the impression of bribery.

Despite the fact that public participation is frequent in wind energy projects, many respondents (39 %) state that they do not have a standard procedure for public participation activities in their organisation. Likewise, formal allocation of resources for these activities does not seem to be part of the usual procedure for many organisations. Additionally, the recommendations given in the published guidelines and toolkits are not widely known and are rarely applied.

Opposition to wind farms seems mostly specific, i.e. against a specific installation. The survey shows that the main negative issues mentioned in relation to wind power projects are the visual impact on landscapes followed by noise and the impact on the local ecosystem and wildlife (figure 1; cp. Hübner & Pohl 2014 for similar results). Arguments that question wind energy on a more general level, e.g. whether it contributes to mitigating climate change, are less frequently reported to play a role. This is in line with the findings from Eurobarometer (already cited above). This is further confirmed by the finding that on the positive side respondents report that the reduction of CO₂ emissions or enhanced air quality are often addressed in discussions around wind farms.

Taken together, this shows that criticism is mainly manifested on a local level while the advantages of wind energy are perceived to be more relevant on a national or global scale. On a local level, economic benefit is the argument that comes up most frequently as a positive aspect of wind power (figure 2). However, that alone may not be sufficient. Thus, it seems important to include a broader set of arguments as to why a wind farm is necessary and useful in a specific area.

It is also noteworthy that about 25 % of the respondents mention that a lack or delay of information is an issue that raises opposition. Thus, providing information to the public and all relevant stakeholders is often seen as a prerequisite for acceptance but may not be solely sufficient.

Together these findings point out that although the importance of social acceptance and public participation is well known there may be a lack of prioritization which leads to a certain lack of knowledge management and standardisation in this regard. The respondents, however, also point out the reasons why it is difficult for them to make use of existing knowledge, meaning that the main challenge seems to be the application of the available knowledge to the conditions of a specific project. With regard to the three levels of public participation displayed in the questionnaire (1. information, 2. consultation, 3. empowerment) the respondents are more in favour of informational and consultation measures. Empowerment of the public, where the public has the opportunity to get involved in the decision itself, is evaluated less positively. Regarding this last point there was a large difference in attitude detected between project developers who evaluated this level of participation quite negatively and respondents working in the field of cooperatives who were in contrast much more enthusiastic about high levels of involvement. To give the decision to the local public may not be a practical approach for every wind farm, but it is an approach that is worth considering for certain projects. According to the data, four groups are currently most often integrated into participation and communication processes: local political authorities, local administration, permitting authorities and the local public. Financial institutions and members of the local economy are less frequently considered. However, securing their public support may be worthwhile as this could positively influence other local stakeholder groups. Participants also suggested that actions involving the community may be coordinated by the municipalities as neutral institutions rather than by project developers.

Respondents were also asked to evaluate the utility of a variety of related and potential communication measures. It was found that all kinds of information and learning opportunities

were generally regarded as useful and most concrete measures were assessed positively. Respondents identified their greatest need in the area of providing balanced information about a project and in learning more about the benefits of working with communities in general. They reported less interest in means of online engagement.

Respondents were interested in receiving information from the WISE Power project on how to deal with all members of the public: those opposing a project, those in favour and those not interested. As pointed out by deliverable 2.1 from the WISE Power project (cp. Fraunhofer ISI, 2014), most published guidelines deal with negative reactions and give advice on how to respond to them. Thus, it seems as if little knowledge is provided regarding how to integrate groups in support of wind or mobilise those who are not interested. Furthermore, our findings show that the experience of project developers regarding public participation is rather concentrated in the early phases of the wind farm lifecycle (planning, permitting and construction). So far little information has been shared about public participation during the later phases of a wind farm lifecycle (operation and maintenance, decommissioning and repowering). However, as it may become more important in the future more knowledge is needed on how to cultivate social acceptance when repowering or decommissioning.

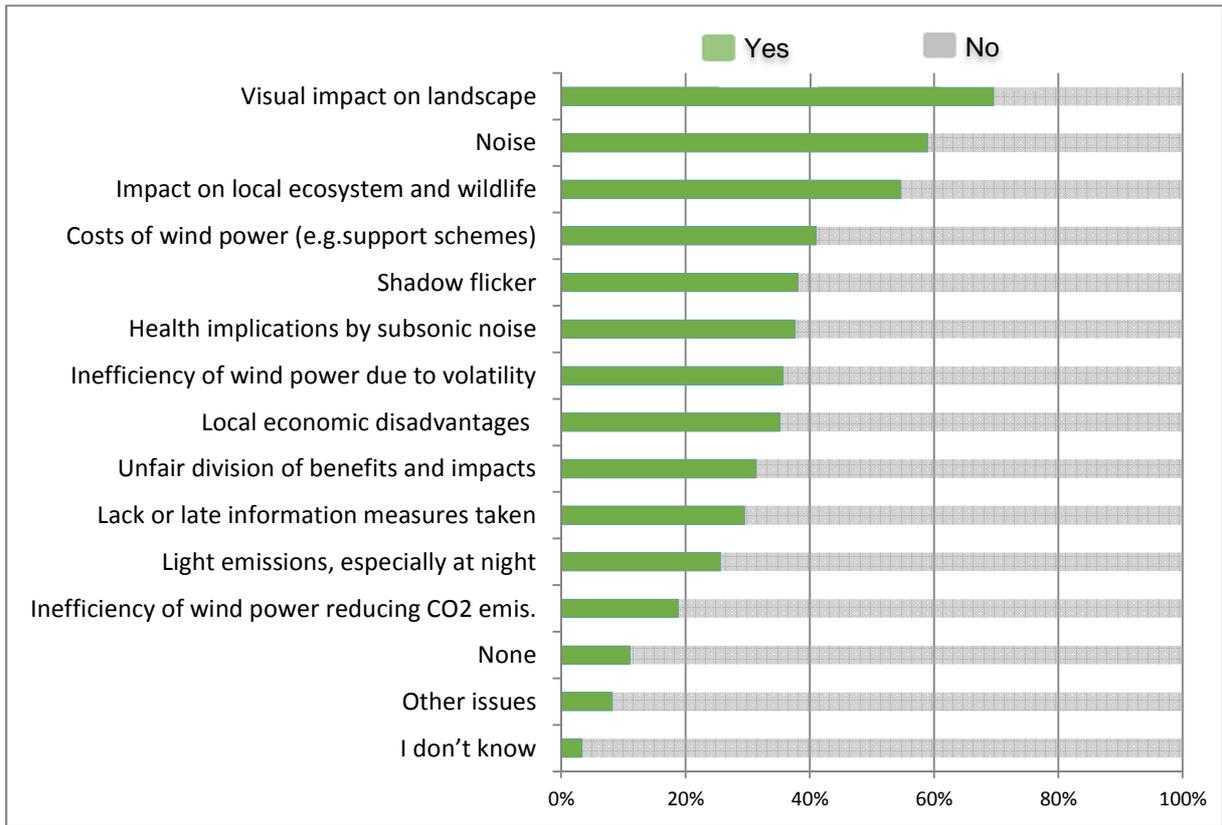


Figure 1. What were the main negative issues raised in relation to wind power projects in the past three years your company or organisation was involved in?

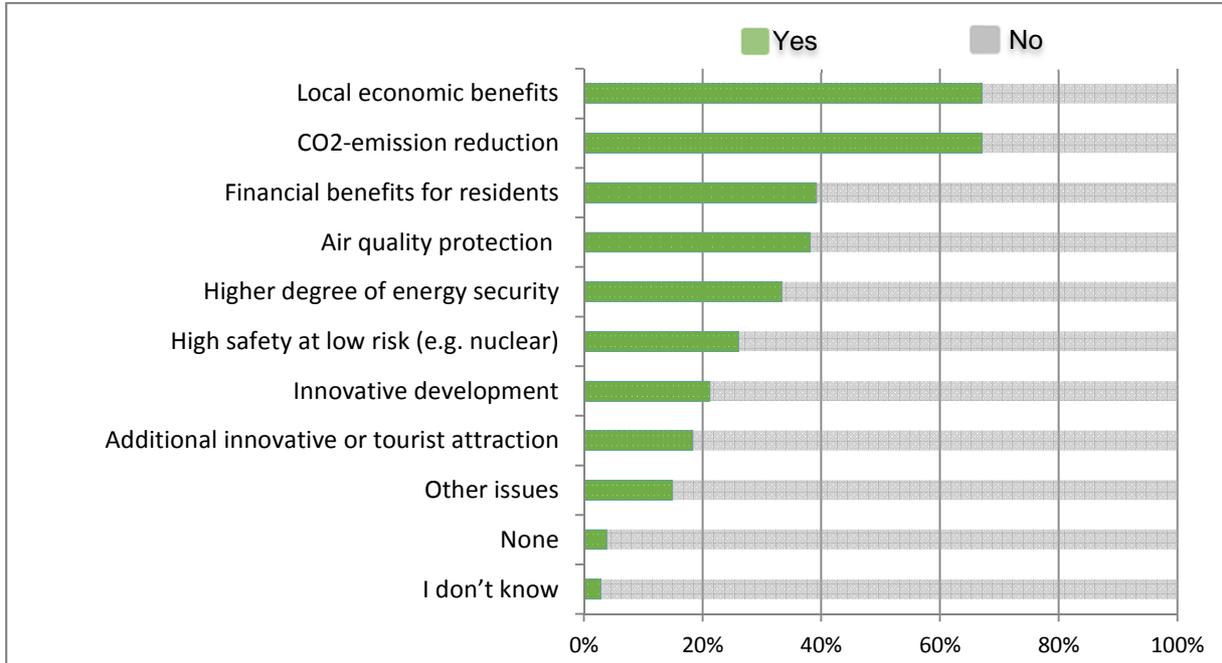


Figure 2. What were the main positive issues raised in relation to wind power projects in the past three years your company or organisation was involved with?

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