

Workshop Report




















on developing measures to promote
civic participation and engagement in
wind energy planning



BIOWIND is an Interreg Europe project seeking to address two major barriers to wind energy deployment at territorial level, opposition from local communities to wind farms and complex permitting processes.



Project Partners

	Province of Flemish Brabant (PVB)			Northern & Western Regional Authority (NWRA)	
	Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia (RCSO)			Zemgale Planning Region (ZPR)	
	Region of Western Greece (RWG)			Marshal Office of Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship (MOSV)	
	University of Patras (UoP)			Asturias Energy Foundation (FAEN)	
	Central Danube Development Agency Nonprofit Ltd (CDDA)			Autonomous Community in the Region of Murcia, General Directorate of the Natural Environment (CARM)	

Advisory Partner



	PROMEIA - The Hellenic Society for the Promotion of Research & Development Methodologies	
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Figure 1: The BIOWIND Partnership

The first in the series of interregional workshops, “A3.1 - Interregional workshop on developing measures to promote civic participation and engagement” was organized by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) and took place from 19-20 September 2023 in Sligo, Ireland.

The aim of the interregional workshop was to provide a ground for discussions between project partners and invited participants to:

- **Exchange** experience and discuss the common challenges and gaps in policies that inhibit community engagement during the different phases of wind energy projects.
- **Elaborate** and exchange ideas on policy measures that could foster civic participation in wind energy projects.
- **Assess** the replicability and transferability of good policy approaches to other geographical areas.
- **Actively contribute** to policy development, taking into account regional specificities regarding wind farm deployment.

The two-day workshop provided an opportunity for participants to gain valuable knowledge on wind energy policy implementation. The workshop featured presentations from consultation, policy making and academic experts on the strengths and shortcomings of policies related to civil participation and community involvement in wind energy projects. Interactive activities such as small group exercises, roundtable discussions and Q&A sessions enabled participants to exchange best practices and advise on policy approaches to support civil participation in wind projects.

Lessons learned

Misinformation as barrier to community engagement

One of the main barriers to community involvement in local wind projects, as well as a major source of social resistance to wind energy development, is the lack of objective and credible information on wind projects, their individual characteristics, and the advantages they offer to local communities. As a result, citizens tend to be less inclined to invest themselves in wind energy projects in their local area, increasing the likelihood of them being against the project in general. In particular, when it comes to community ownership of wind farms, local residents tend to be less likely to take part in energy co-operatives, as they are uncertain about the regulatory framework and the advantages of the project at both the individual and community

levels. Therefore, information dissemination and transparent communication are essential for building trust among community stakeholders, local authorities, and project developers.

The role of the State

National governments have a key role to play in promoting community involvement in wind power projects and driving energy efficiency. Policies to promote wind energy and encourage community involvement in energy development need to be in line with wider national objectives, such as diversifying energy sources, increasing energy security, enhance long term electricity price stability, and job creation. Grid access regulations have been identified as important factors shaping wind energy growth and viability of energy communities. Similarly, community engagement guidelines were shown to have played a significant role in driving energy co-operatives and social adoption of wind energy.

Financial incentives and compensation schemes as drivers of community engagement and social acceptance

Local community members are more likely to engage with local wind energy developments if they consider the development as beneficial rather than a risk to their lives and the community's overall interest. Establishing community benefit schemes supporting the active or passive financial participation of residents in the vicinity of wind farms has been highlighted as instrumental in encouraging local community involvement in local wind energy projects. Particularly effective are active participation schemes where local residents are directly involved in wind energy projects, either as co-owners of the wind farm through the establishment of energy co-operatives. Alternatively, community engagement can be enhanced by compensation schemes (i.e., passive participation). Notable compensation schemes include land lease payments to landowners where turbines are sited, reduced electricity tariffs to local residents, royalty compensation for local residents living near to wind turbines, community trusts, and tax revenues from the wind farm's operation.

The importance of early-stage engagement

Community engagement should be initiated early on, preferably during the planning phase of a wind energy project. Early-stage engagement allows communities to voice concerns, initiate early dialogue, and address any potential misconceptions. This allows the community to gain a better understanding of the project and its potential benefits. In turn this can help to foster trust, as communities become aware of when and how they can be involved. Policy makers and project developers should ensure that citizens' concerns are addressed, that awareness raising activities are organised, and that direct and transparent communication channels are established.

Policy guidelines & recommendations

The following policy guidelines and recommendations are based on the outcomes of the workshop and the participant's remarks on the topics discussed. Governments and policy making bodies can adapt the policy approaches outlined in this section to support civic involvement in wind energy development and to promote wind deployment. A combination of policies will, in many cases, be most effective in meeting country specific objectives and challenges.

National Survey on citizens' attitude towards renewables

In community engagement there is no "one-size-fits-all" as effective engagement policies need to take into account the local values and priorities and address local concerns. To develop a nation-wide strategy and appropriate tools measures to address concerns of citizens and promote community engagement in renewable energy developments, national governments are encouraged to commission national surveys on citizens' attitudes towards renewables, to be carried out on a regular basis (e.g., biannually). The surveys are recommended to track measure on both support and awareness of the various types of renewable energy (e.g., solar, wind, hydro, etc.) and the regulative framework regarding the deployment of renewables (e.g., application process, financial incentives provided, etc.). It is further recommended that the surveys aim to identify the attitude of citizens based on different variables, such as prior experience living near a RES project, perception of climate change, household income, etc.

Community Engagement Guidelines for Project Developers

It is recommended that national governments establish a common set of Community Engagement Guidelines for project developers to enable communities and developers to engage constructively throughout the lifecycle of an onshore / offshore wind project, aiming to deliver the benefits that local people need in a manner that is equitable to all parties involved. The Guidelines should use and present widely accepted principles, methods, and frameworks specific to the wind industry. They should also include specific community engagement actions that developers can implement at various stages of the lifecycle to improve communication, facilitate and address community needs, and enhance the project's likelihood of success. Finally, it would be beneficial if the Community Engagement Guidelines also include a Toolkit containing tools and templates that project developers can tailor and use to their needs.

Municipal Community Benefit Fund

Apart from the community benefit funds and packages established on a voluntary base by project developers and operators, local municipalities are advised to set up municipal

community benefit funds. In particular, for offshore wind parks where local communities may not benefit the most, it is important to ensure that at least a portion of the value creation from the wind farm's operation takes place locally. The municipal benefit fund should be a separate branch of the municipal budget, primarily funded by the tax revenue from the operation of the wind farm, and the funds should be allocated to investments that are visible to the public. Communication regarding the use of tax revenue and the choice of investments is also essential. For example, community acceptance is significantly higher when citizens are informed that the tax revenue generated by the wind park is being used for the renovation of a local kindergarten or gym.

Encourage Shared Ownership

The workshop discussions and presentations highlighted the importance of local community involvement in the early stage of negotiation of a project, particularly if the community is offered a stake in the project. Shared ownership has shown to generate significant community benefits while also encouraging greater co-operation, coordination, and collaboration at local level. Furthermore, it boosts local and community pride and leadership, as well as the empowerment of local communities. Local authorities should prioritise the potential for shared ownership, and raise the alternative as early as possible, likely to be the point the project is announced. They should focus on gauging the level of community interest in shared ownership, exploring the various models of shared ownership, and clarifying community's preferences on such a business model. To which end, local authorities are advised to appoint a small working group to facilitate conversations with the project's developers and the community regarding the establishment of shared ownership scheme.

Simplified procedures for small scale producers and energy co-operatives

It is recommended that small scale producers, including co-operatives and those with shared ownership investments, receive preferential access to the grid. Similarly, national governments are advised to establish a guidance framework to facilitate and assist small scale producers and energy co-operatives through the application process and gaining access to funding. This will help to reduce costs, improve returns on investment and significantly reduce the risk of conflicts with the local communities. It is also recommended that national governments develop a step-by-step guide published online and easily accessible by interested citizens to navigate the application form and process. Regional and local governments could potentially also establish regional or local offices for in-person services regarding the application process and funding opportunities.

Involve citizens and stakeholders the end of project stage

The effectiveness of early stage engagement in alleviating citizens' concerns and increasing their public acceptance of local wind projects has already been discussed. It is equally important that the local community is given the chance to voice their concerns and opinions at the end of the project. Early discussions about possible next steps are important in gauging opinion and getting people involved. These discussions should commence long before the project's end of life and citizens should be provided with the opportunity to express their concerns and preferences about the site's future after the end of operation (i.e., decommissioning or repowering).

Differentiate Feed in Tariffs for smaller scale projects & energy co-operatives

Feed-in Tariffs (FITs) provide a fixed per kilowatt-hour payment for renewable electricity that is "fed" into the grid²⁰. FITs are designed to facilitate the uptake of renewable energy technologies by offering a long-term purchase agreement for electricity generation at a fixed price, hence providing market certainty for developers. Governments are advised to adopt a small (e.g., <20 kW) and medium-scale (e.g., <50 kW) wind FIT policy which sets differentiated tariffs based on project size. Differentiated FITs can help shorten the payback horizon of small-scale projects, which in turn helps decrease investment costs and associated risks. In addition, differentiated FITs provide both energy security and grid reliability for wind energy production.

Keep citizens informed

During the workshop, it was highlighted that misinformation was a major obstacle to community involvement and a major factor in local opposition to wind energy development. To combat misinformation, public authorities, preferably in co-operation with project developers, should focus on disseminating information through all available channels. This could include public information campaigns on the benefits of the energy transition, such as mitigating climate change or reducing pollution, and on climate change as a whole. Additionally, it is beneficial to investigate whether local concerns and conflicts can be addressed through measures such as additional financial compensation, redesigns, and relocations, in order to foster acceptance. If these efforts do not yield results, a clear message from the government stating that the transition is non-negotiable could be a viable option, as could individual meetings with relevant stakeholders. In this context, it could be easier to persuade stakeholders and engage in a fact-based discussion. In the case of approved wind projects, governments on national, regional, and local level could make use of printed (e.g., quarterly newsletter) and digital media (e.g., social media posts) to keep citizens informed about

developments, sponsored activities, and news related to the wind parks, including the initiatives funded and implemented with the wind parks revenues.

Conclusions

For communities, engagement offers a chance to gain a better understanding of the proposed project, to explore the project's added value for the area, to identify which options would be most suitable in the local context, and to help shape solutions that work for all actors involved. Through raising awareness and actively involving local communities in wind energy projects, public authorities can foster a shift in the nature of local communities' engagement from one of non-participation to a more proactive shareholder base.

Good community engagement approaches and policies can support communities, project developers, and local authorities to improve project plans, leading to better overall decisions and outcomes. They also provide public authorities with an opportunity to identify and develop benefits for local communities tailored to their needs. Finally, transparent and inclusive community engagement can increase public knowledge and awareness of the nation-wide importance of wind energy and minimise disruptions in the construction of wind energy projects.