

Policy Brief

Promoting civic participation and engagement in wind energy planning*January 2025***Introduction**

All over Europe, numerous wind energy projects have been put on hold due to opposition by local communities and environmental groups. Often, this opposition can be attributed to a lack of civic engagement and participation.

Engagement offers a chance for stakeholders to gain a better understanding of proposed projects, to explore 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. This can result in a more proactive shareholder base, in better plans and less opposition or disruption.

Governments and policy making bodies can implement the approaches outlined in this policy brief to support civic involvement in wind energy development and to increase social acceptance. A combination of policies will, in many cases, be most effective in meeting country specific objectives and challenges.

This policy brief is based on a background study ¹ and an interregional workshop on developing measures to promote civic participation and engagement in wind energy planning². The workshop was organised by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) from 19-20 September 2023 in Sligo, Ireland, as an activity in the framework of the BIOWIND Interreg Europe project.

Policy recommendations**1. Survey citizen's attitudes**

Effective engagement policies should start from actual attitudes towards renewables and need to address local concerns. Regular (e.g. biannual) and representative national, regional or even local surveys can track awareness of and support for different types of renewables and identify specific stumbling blocks. This information will also help to develop the local public consultation process that is indispensable when starting a new wind power project. The consultation will offer even more details of local attitudes and concerns, while at the

¹ Interreg Europe BIOWIND. 'Guidelines for the Interregional Workshop on developing measures to promote civic participation and engagement in wind energy planning' (2023)

² Interreg Europe BIOWIND. 'Workshop Report on developing measures to promote civic participation and engagement in wind energy planning' (2023)

same time reinforcing the social capital of a wind development project.

2. Start early

Community engagement should be initiated early on, preferably during the planning phase of a concrete wind energy project or even better in the early stages of spatial planning. Early-stage engagement allows communities to voice concerns and initiate early dialogue, whereas authorities and developers can address any potential misconceptions.

3. Keep citizens informed

To tackle NIMBY-effect, objective and credible information is needed in order to combat misinformation. Public authorities should disseminate clear and fact-based information through all available channels. Disclose project details, including environmental and social impact assessments. Include information about the reasons for selecting a specific location and benefits of the wind farm, such as job creation, tax revenues, contributions to clean energy goals and infrastructure improvement. Start at an early stage and continue through the design, planning, construction, and operation phases. Activities can include printed or online dissemination of information and the organization of interactive sessions such as public forums, Q&A sessions, site visits and “meet the experts” meetings. Individual meetings with relevant stakeholders can make it easier to engage in a fact-based discussion. Once wind projects are approved, national, regional or local governments should keep making use of printed and digital media to keep citizens informed, including news about initiatives funded with the wind parks revenues.

4. Address concerns

Addressing concerns of local communities in regard to the impacts wind turbines and associated infrastructure works have is highly beneficial in creating trust in local authorities and the overall wind energy project and associated procedures.

A functional approach to alleviate community concerns is to establish consultation mechanisms in tandem with awareness raising activities where citizens can be informed and actively voice their concerns and needs during the development of spatial plans to indicate areas suitable for wind energy developments, as well as the development of environmental and biodiversity plans and strategies. Visual simulations (even using VR) can alleviate aesthetic concerns; noise data can offer a comparison with everyday noises; effects of mitigation measures can address concerns regarding wildlife impact and falling property prices.

5. Guidelines for project developers

National or regional governments can establish community engagement guidelines for project developers, enabling local communities and developers to engage throughout the lifecycle of a wind project. The guidelines can include principles, methods and frameworks, list specific actions and offer a toolkit with a roadmap and templates that can be tailored for each specific project. Irish examples include the 2016 Code of Practice for wind energy developments and the 2019 draft Wind Energy Guidelines.

6. Financial incentives as drivers of community engagement

Establishing community benefit schemes supporting the active or passive financial

participation of residents in the vicinity of wind farms is instrumental in encouraging local community involvement. 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.

6.1 Shared ownership

Shared ownership has shown to generate significant community benefits while also encouraging greater co-operation, coordination, and collaboration at local level. Local authorities should raise the alternative of shared ownership as early as possible. A good example is the open participation offer to local investment of Enel Green Power S.p.A while developing the Galatea project in Spain.³

A working group can gauge the level of community interest in it, explore the various models, clarify the community's preferences and facilitate conversations between the project developers and the community.

6.2 Simplified procedures and differentiated tariffs for small scale producers and energy co-operatives

It is recommended that small scale producers, including co-operatives, energy communities and those with shared ownership investments, receive preferential access to the grid. National or regional governments are advised to provide a guidance framework, a step-by-step guide and in-person support to facilitate and assist small scale producers, energy co-operatives and energy communities through the application process and gaining access to funding. Differentiated feed-in tariffs for small and medium-scale projects can further support small-scale projects.

6.3. Municipal community benefit fund

Local municipalities are advised to set up municipal community benefit funds, ensuring that a portion of the value creation from a wind farm's operation takes place locally. The fund can be a separate branch of the municipal budget, primarily funded by the tax revenue from the operation of the wind farm, and the funds can be allocated to investments that are visible to the public.

7. Invest in dispute resolution

Conflicts between the local community, the project developer and relevant authorities can escalate, leading to long and complex court cases and attracting negative publicity. This is why it is essential for authorities to establish dispute resolution mechanisms. Good mechanisms are overseen by independent committees, guarantee transparency and impartiality and are time- and cost-efficient. They enhance the credibility in and legitimacy of the process, promoting buy-in and trust among citizens.

³ <https://www.interregeurope.eu/good-practices/open-participation-offer-to-local-investment-while-developing-the-aeolic-project>

8. Involve citizens and stakeholders at the project's end

The local community should also be given the chance to voice concerns and opinions at the end of a wind energy project. Early discussions long before the project's end are important in gauging opinion and getting people involved, whether there is a preference for decommissioning or for repowering.

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