Complexity of concern: Social acceptance of wind energy and the inevitability of dissensus

Complexity of concern: Social acceptance of wind energy and the inevitability of dissensus
The concept of ‘acceptance’;
Drivers of opposition/acceptance;
The goal of acceptance strategies?
The need for some fresh thinking...
The Concept of Social Acceptance

Community acceptance
Related to the acceptance of specific wind energy developments by host communities.

Socio-political acceptance
Related to acceptance of wind technology as a viable energy source and supported in government policy and by the general public.

Market acceptance
Related to the acceptance of wind technology by investors, financial institutions and consumers of electricity.

Social Acceptance of Wind Energy

The Concept of Social Acceptance
(after Wustenhagen et al 2007)
Social acceptance has been an invaluable concept for focusing on the 'problem' and its elements.

Batel and Devine Wright (2013) and the language of acceptance;
- ‘Acceptance’ justifies, legitimises and reproduces the top-down perspectives
- It largely focusing on objectors;
  - It neglects terms such as support, uncertainty, resistance, or apathy.

This also tends to prioritise the consenting process, not long term relationships,
- It this allows ‘winners’ rather than a settling of differences
- Are there alternatives or supplements to the concept’?
Opposition to wind energy projects is driven by:

- **Health and environmental impacts;**
  - Concerns over visual, bio-diversity, well-being impacts on local area etc;
- **Fairness of decision-making process;**
  - Lack of trust in developers, regulators and the transparency of the consenting regime;
- **Perceived distribution of costs and benefits;**
  - Fear that external companies accrue key benefits, while local communities bear main costs;
Climate Change

- Climate change will destroy the area more permanently than a few wind turbines
- This process is being driven by Kyoto which lacks credibility since the US has not signed up
- Conventional power generation and fuel use drives climate change and should be changed

- The benefits to climate change of this project will be negated by the environmental damage it causes
- This is more about reaching EU quotas on carbon than a properly thought out process

- Planning service does not the legislation to cover this development
- There is no application because this project is a feasibility study – it is about finding out the whole story
- Land use planning procedures do not apply at sea and siting offshore is a way to circumnavigate due process
- Decision should delayed until CZ Management Strategy is implemented
- Dispute over ownership of the seabed
- People have no choice but to object loudly as silence is seen as acceptance
- Concerns over the procurement process and how EBR awarded contract
- The Irish citizens will receive no benefits and are not included in the decision making process
- Undemocratic that Gov Dept can press ahead without Assembly debate

Governance

- May affect future development associated with Deny Airport by restricting flight paths
- Can affect radar, mobile phones, radio communications, sonar, television signals
- Restrict the size of vessels using the Foyle estuary and affect ferry services
- Turbines are temporary structures for 25 years which will be removed

Infrastructure

- Windmills 60 - 80m high, 600m apart 85m off shore
- Uncertainty over number of turbines
- Large exclusion zone around turbines for small vessels on traditional fishing grounds
- Will need landfill station somewhere
- Offshore windmills still need pylons and infrastructure once they come ashore
- Conventional power supplies will run out and we need new technologies to deliver power
- Will not be able to adjust to peak demand times
- Supply is intermittent and unpredictable
- Wave and tidal power would be less intrusive and more reliable
- No power stations will close
- The technology does not exist to store the power effectively
- Conventional power stations are very inefficient
- RWW should clearly state how much benefit it will bring
- Local people will benefit from cheaper electricity
- Jobs will be created

Supply

- May provide nursery reef for fish and protected area
- Disrupt bird migration paths (Klopper Swarms)
- There is no trustworthy process to assess impacts that is not influenced by the developer
- Affect fish migration (Salmon & Eels)
- Blinders may kill birds
- All the impacts will be assessed and mitigated for
- Effects are unknown
- Affect the movement of the sands and the formation of the Tunnels
- May destroy blue flag beaches
- Cause sands to move away from the spit
- Negatively affect shipping routes
- May cause turbulence and wind damage

Tunnels

- Tunnels Plateau – an invention
- The generating technology chooses the location, there are limits to what can be achieved
- Mythological importance of the Tunnels
- Red sails in the Sunset

- There are other sites which have less intrinsic value
- EBR did not have alternative sites to consider
- Tourists will not be put off
- Be visible from Slieve, Greencastle to Carlingford, Portrush and Giant's Causeway

Location

- We all live in a capitalist economy
- Wind industry is heavily subsidised which distorts the real costs
- Money invested in the wind industry is used to develop more effective technologies
- Prohibit trawling and not fishing industries
- Drill not fishing for salmon has been banned by the EU and turbines may provide habitats suitable for red and line fishing
- Local people will pay for this through their taxes, high electricity costs and loss of natural resources
- This is about making money for corporations not saving the environment

- Conventional power stations are also subsidised by taxes

Amenity

- Will cause drop in tourist numbers
- People are taxed to pay for wind

Culture

- Black culture and culture is important

Economics

- Some of the companies behind the project are big polluters and involved in nuclear industry
- Climate change is a fact exaggerated by human activity that needs urgently to be addressed
- Wind farms are part of a combined strategy to combat climate change
- More should be done to stop existing emissions

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Foot-Print

- If the developers provide some form of local benefits that may be seen as a bribe

Local Benefits

- Jobs will be created

Amenity

- Will cause drop in tourist numbers
- People are taxed to pay for wind

Conventional power stations are also subsidised by taxes
Scale-acceptance trade offs?

- Multi-national power company.
- Part-local ownership in externally driven project.
- Locally owned project in restricted private ownership.
- National Co-operative, with no geographic focus of shareholders.
- Local Co-operative drawn entirely from host communities.
Multi-level scales of concern and governance

- Multi-scalar influences on energy governance and the drivers for wind energy. For example in the UK:
  - Global energy/climate concerns
  - EU targets;
  - Energy as a UK national issue;
  - Reliance of devolved administrations for delivery of renewables;
  - The ‘territorialisation ‘ of energy through the municipal planning process;
  - Local site battles aim to reframe level and scale of concerns.
- Apart from local site disputes, the spatial dimension of energy policy/governance is largely undeveloped.
The normative goal of policy remains consensus, although this is rarely, if ever found.

Dissensus across spatial scales of governance and project size, yet acceptance tends to be focused on individual projects.

Dissensus across and between many key stakeholders, yet attention is largely focussed on objectors;

Intricacies and influence of local cultures and contexts.
Community acceptance increasingly looking like it will define the ultimate level of wind energy across Europe;

The situation seems to be getting worse rather than improving;

Responses seem ad hoc (e.g. Community benefits)

We don’t really know what is working, what isn’t?

Weak links between energy and planning policy

Timeframes seem inadequate;

Institutions, cultures and practices seem to be inadequate to the challenge of community acceptance.

How can we stimulate innovation and experimentation?
Re-thinking acceptance?

- Replace acceptance with ‘Transition’ as the central focus of research enquiry and policy;
- Engage more stakeholders, as different scales and chronologies;
- Explore the appropriate use of authoritarian, competitive and collaborative processes.
Increasing structuration of activities in local practices

Socio-economical Landscape

Pressure creates ‘Windows of opportunities’

Socio-economical Regime

Existing socio-economical regime is ‘dynamically stable’. On different dimensions there are ongoing processes

Niche Innovations

External influences on niches (via expectations and networks)

Niche stabilization

New configuration breaks through, taking advantage of ‘windows of opportunity’. Adjustments occur in socio-economical regime

Science

Landscape developments put pressure on existing regime

• Aging Population

• Lower budgets

Markets

New regime influences landscape

Technology

The new regime is able to deal with the landscape pressure

Policy

New socio-economical regime is ‘dynamically stable’. On different dimensions there are ongoing processes

Culture

Elements become aligned and stabilize in a dominant design. Internal momentum increases.

Industry

Experiments: Learning processes take place on multiple dimensions (co-construction).

Small networks of actors support novelties on the basis of expectations and visions.

Time

{Based on: Geels & Schot, 2007}
‘Acceptance’ as a Transition issue

- Reinforces energy as socio-technical system;
- Helps focus on the need to foster innovation niches for approaches to acceptance;
- Awareness of the influence of the regime to be open to such experiences;
- Gives rise to concepts such as:
  - Tension: mismatches between the regime and the landscape
  - Stress: internal mismatches within the regime
  - Pressure: mismatch from niches upwards
- The need for a long term vision, careful management and scope for innovation

*Frantzeskaki and de Haan*
Elements of a better approach to community acceptance

- National Energy Vision and Policy context
- Long term Acceptance Strategy
- Community initiatives
- Corporate Responses
- Regulator Driven Strategies
Some suggestions...

- **Government Actions:**
  - A 30 year national transition plan- structures, cultures, practices
  - Local transition plans
  - Community energy strategy
  - A focus on trust building in policy and decision making

- **Regulator Actions:**
  - Transparent decision-making with adequate opportunities for voice, in which all are respected;
  - Linking planning policy with energy policy;
  - Compulsory local share offers;
  - Community benefit register;
  - Rethinking ownership of wind as an asset?
Some suggestions...

**Corporate actions:**
- Recognising, mitigating and avoiding local impacts;
- Promoting innovation through competition for sites: Community wind auctions;
- Greater self regulation or accreditation?

**Community actions:**
- Local advocacy and links to sustainability strategies (e.g. Transition Towns, LA21);
- Promotion of Co-operatives and community asset transfers;
- Increased use of intermediary bodies;
- Deliberative processes for local energy strategies.
Final words

- Is acceptance still a useful concept?
- How can we conceptualise and manage the complexity of acceptance?
- What are the implications of rejecting consensus and recognising the inevitability of dissensus?
- Using Transition Studies to reframe ‘acceptance’ issues.
Thank you