Facts, Hacks and Turbines: Media Analysis of Irish Wind Energy


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Facts, Hacks and Turbines: Media Analysis of Irish Wind Energy

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Wind Energy in Ireland

Source: SEAI: (2015)

Source: UK Sustainable Development Commission, 2005
Community acceptance generally seen to be driven by:

- Perceived health and environmental impacts;
- Fairness of decision-making process
- Perceived distribution of costs and benefits
- Social representation of these issues and their interpretation in specific social contexts.
The social framing of wind energy

- The attitude-behaviour gap and framing of NIMBY ‘deviancy’.
- Issues of scale, place, process, actor involvement all influence the discourse and meaning of ‘wind energy’.
- The multiple representations of wind energy and its shaping of the public’s response to place-specific developments.
- The dynamic of social representations and discourses as wind developments increase, change in scale and occupy new spaces.
The media and public perception

- The media play a key role in (re)producing, validating and transforming dominant discourses, meanings and truth claims.
- The media’s place in the social-technological system of energy.
- Media portrayal influenced by journalistic norms, perceptions of news worthiness, broader political economy of the media etc...
- Media received and interpreted in terms of existing worldviews, immediate concerns etc ...
- Increasing complexity of media and role of the print outlets.
Sample of three key newspapers 2000-2015:

- Irish Times (circulation 93k)
- Irish Independent (circulation 126k)
- Irish Examiner (circulation 40k)

Sampling:

- 12 search terms using Nexis UK (wind energy, wind power etc) = 19894 articles
- Cleaning, relevancy and removal of duplications = 8224 articles
Methodological approach [2]

- Descriptive statistics
- Content analysis using 35 key terms on sample (1 in 6 articles):
  - Historical diachronic (time)
  - Comparative synchronic (difference between papers)
- Qualitative content analysis of 200 articles (1 in 35) from 2007-2015, using Atlas.ti
- Coding of 282 articles taken from peak media activity (Nov 2007-Jan 2008)
ALL PAPERS: Total stories by month, January 2000-June 2015

Irish Independent goes online
Irish Examiner goes online
Total stories in three Irish newspapers by month

- The Irish Times
- Irish Independent
- Irish Examiner
## Content analysis results for three Irish newspapers (2006-2015, 1 in 6 sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>NO. OF MENTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landowner</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIMBY</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>1100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>1300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>1400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vibration</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise</td>
<td>1600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape</td>
<td>1700</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>1800</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>1900</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>2100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developers</td>
<td>2200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>2300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Radar</td>
<td>2400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird strike</td>
<td>2500</td>
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<tr>
<td>House prices</td>
<td>2600</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low frequency</td>
<td>2700</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental groups</td>
<td>2800</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community benefit</td>
<td>2900</td>
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<tr>
<td>Property values</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate change</td>
<td>3100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The NO. OF MENTIONS values are approximate and represent the number of mentions in the analyzed articles.
Coding results of selected items from 3 Irish newspapers
(2007 – 2015, 1 in 6 sample) % of articles mentioning items

- Community
- Economy
- Climate
- Environment
Coding results of selected items from 3 Irish newspapers (2007 – 2015, 1 in 6 sample)
Overall Discourse: positive, negative or neutral
(2007-2015 sample)
Overall discourse: positive, negative or neutral (n=200, Nov 2007 - Jan 2008)
Dominant framings
(n.200, Nov 2007 - Jan 2008)

- Economic
- Environmental
- Technological
- Social
Scale of concern: local, national, global
(n.200, Nov 2007 - Jan 2008)
Issues of voice
(n.200, Nov 2007 - Jan 2008)

- Government/Political
- Energy companies
- Environmental/Lobby groups
- Local communities
- Citizens/Public
Conclusions

- Broad consensus amongst three key newspapers, but emphasise different issues;
- An inevitable dynamic nature of issues and coverage, key issues being:
  - Gradual increase of positive stories
  - Developer interests appear to dominate
  - Economic and national interests more commonly presented
  - Voices of protest register when influencing these dominant values
- No clear link between press coverage and ‘acceptance’, but can be seen in context of the transition of the Irish energy system.