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Summary

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Authors:		ICLEI EURO: Giorgia Rambelli, Arthur Hinsch, Julia Kittel		

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Summary: EU Policy Roundtable - Knowledge Transfer of Innovative Mechanisms for Socially-Inclusive Wind Energy across Europe



Drafted by

ICLEI Europe
*Giorgia Rambelli,
Arthur Hinsch
and Julia Kittel*

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“Knowledge Transfer of Innovative Mechanisms for Socially-Inclusive Wind Energy across Europe”

Introduction

With this year’s introduction of the EU Clean Energy Package, the ongoing revision of the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) and in line with the EU’s call for a more socially fair energy transition, the WinWind project brought the discussion on socially-inclusive wind energy to the European Sustainable Energy Week. Building on discussions held in national policy roundtables in the 6 WinWind target countries (Germany, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Poland, and Spain), the project has successfully carried out an EU policy roundtable titled “Knowledge Transfer of Innovative Mechanisms for Socially-Inclusive Wind Energy across Europe” on 17 June 2019 at the premises of the Representation of the Region of Umbria in Brussels. The event focused on discussing and providing responses to how to ensure a more socially-fair energy transition, by facilitating democratic approaches to wind energy deployment in particular.

The workshop was divided in two parts with the morning session comprising two panel discussions. The panels in the morning focused respectively on how the recent changes in EU legislation will affect the social acceptance of wind energy at the local level, and on innovative mechanisms to foster social acceptance of wind energy and facilitation on a pan-European scale.

The afternoon featured a World Café session discussing the barriers to socially inclusive wind energy, the role of regional/local governments as well as criteria for fair wind energy development. Participants were also introduced to selected WinWind best practices by project partners. These were presented through posters during the lunch break.

The event was registered as an EU Energy Day and held as part of the European Sustainable Energy Week 2019 in Brussels.

This European Roundtable was held in conjunction with the **session “[Speed up the energy transition by raising social acceptance](#)”**, which took place on 19 June, **held as part of the official High Level Policy Conference** of the EUSEW. The session was led by ICLEI Europe, and co-organized with the Winwind consortium, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Architects Council of Europe, the Regional Council of Lapland, Poliedra – Politecnico di Milano, Friends of the Earth Europe and the APPROVE project. A keynote by the European Economic and Social Committee emphasized the role of community-led energy, the importance of ownership and to enable people to use their local renewable resources. Community-based approaches, strong political commitment, participatory planning, multi-stakeholder cooperation, but also the availability of technical capacity were discussed as being fundamental ingredients for raising social acceptance of renewable energy technologies. Please find the main outcomes of the session at the end of this document.

Altogether, close to 200 participants attended the events.

The European Policy Roundtable:

Maria-Rosaria Di Nucci of FU Berlin, the Coordinator of the WinWind project, opened the event underlining that social acceptance of local energy projects plays a key role in the transformation of the EU's energy system. Although the energy transition is generally supported by the vast majority of the population, its implementation faces criticism and large energy projects lack support and provoke considerable local opposition. Initiatives against the deployment of wind energy in particular are proliferating on an unprecedented scale, fuelled by a clear lack of trust in developers, local governments and in the overall participatory procedures. To remedy this, the WinWind project identifies region-specific barriers and drivers of socially-inclusive wind development. The project showcases best practice examples and novel governance mechanisms for effective community participation and engagement. While engaging with private and public stakeholders from all government levels, the project initiates a transfer of suitable measures and concepts between the partner countries and wind energy scarce regions. One of the outcomes of the project will be guiding principles and criteria for fair (socially-inclusive) wind energy. These will serve as an orientation for regional, national or European policy development.



Panel 1: Strengthening social acceptance and community engagement through EU policy

The first panel was opened by a keynote by Eero Ailio, Adviser on Energy Transition & Local Governance at DG Energy at the European Commission, who reflected on the implications of the EU Clean Energy Package for a socially fair energy transition. Within the developed Package, the European Commission aims to strongly push for a fair deal for consumers and for the development of decentralized, community owned energy. Now national regulations need to be aligned with these objectives within the Member States. He explained that in order to achieve the very ambitious goals set in the EU climate strategy for 2050, considerable (private) funding needs to be leveraged. The new EU legislation provides a clear signal to investors that an inclusive enabling environment is being created. The focus on a fair deal for consumers also marks a clear departure from previous ways of thinking where citizens were simply asked to pay their electricity bill without having much choice if they wanted to give shape to their consumption habits as well as regarding the origin of their electricity. The European Commission has a clear aim to make

“Citizens at the center” is more than just a slogan. We will go around the capitals saying that this makes sense. – Eero Ailio, European Commission

energy bills transparent. It was underlined that the fact that renewable energy communities are now enshrined in EU legislation is a huge step forward as it provides the rights to generate, consume, store and sell renewable energy, without being subject to disproportionate procedures and charges that are not cost-reflective.

Panelists on the first panel, moderated by Holger Robrecht, Deputy Regional Director at ICLEI Europe, reiterated that the changes in European legislation are indeed beneficial for socially-fair wind energy in general, but also highlighted that it is up to the local level to ultimately secure adequate procedural or financial participation of citizens. Having the right general enabling framework in place is good, however adequate inclusion of citizens is more important. Dirk Vansintjan, President of REScoop.eu, gave an example of just how important EU policies are for enabling a more socially-fair energy transition. Before the liberalization of the EU electricity market it was close to impossible for energy cooperatives to sell their electricity into the grid. When European unbundling policy came along in 2003, this acted as a critical enabler for cooperative energy. Now with the new rights for renewable energy communities having being enshrined in the current EU Clean Energy Package, the cooperative movement is growing even stronger. This is particularly crucial in Eastern European countries where energy cooperatives are still underdeveloped – and especially as the Clean Energy Package asks member states to put the right regulatory framework in place. Financing and capacity support is required to adequately support community-owned energy cooperatives, and to make them competitive against larger energy companies which currently are creating and organizing themselves as cooperatives – even though the definition of renewable energy communities in the Revised Renewable Energy Directive ([RED II](#)) excludes large companies from eligibility. Municipalities are now more and more pushing developers to facilitate joint ownership of cooperatives up to 50%, and the changes brought about by the new Directive will help all involved stakeholders to revisit the debate on how community ownership can be best approached and facilitated by both energy cooperatives as well as developers. Dorina Iuga, Senior Project Manager at Wind Europe, emphasized the fact that cooperatives and wind energy developers can, and do, work together very well and reiterated that wind energy is key to achieve a more sustainable Europe and to create jobs.

Andrew Cooper, Councillor Kirklees Council in the UK, emphasized how important it is that new directives get implemented at the local level. Effective implementation by the national government is crucial but should not get in the way of the local level “doing good things”.

Panelists and participants therefore concluded that “citizens at the center” is more than just a slogan.

Panel 2: Transferring social acceptance and community engagement policies

The second panel was opened by a keynote from Dörte Ohlhorst, Lecturer at the Bavarian School of Public Policy who provided an overview of the currently stagnating wind turbine deployment in Germany, citing the increase in local opposition as one of the main causes. It was explicitly mentioned that opposition to wind turbines is not always an expression of NIMBYism (the so called Not In My BackYard syndrome), and often is based on substantiated concern which needs to be taken seriously. These concerns are often amplified by statements from right-wing populists who stir up existing frustrations against the „ruling elites“, stating that it is only them who profit from the energy transition. This significantly aggravates distrust in decision makers. A switch from the “traditional“ remuneration system through a guaranteed feed-in-tariff to an auction based system has also contributed to a strong decrease in the rate of new energy cooperatives being created. The German project „AcceptEE“ has analyzed the implications of wind energy on the natural environment and provides an overview of the conditions under which local renewable energy projects are more likely to be accepted. One particular challenge is the difficulty to explain the need for more wind energy deployment despite the fact that Germany is not reaching its climate protection goals. Properly communicating climate concepts is therefore essential for increasing identification with the project and generate trust in local institutions. The proliferation of local governments setting 100% renewable energy targets can be seen as a good example in this regard.



Following the presentation, Michael Krug of FU Berlin, Co-Coordinator of the WinWind project, invited panelists to share examples from the ground. He referred to a number of guiding questions formulated in a dedicated input paper which has been prepared for the European policy roundtable.

Dieter Sell, Director of Thuringia’s Energy and Green Tech Agency (ThEGA), presented the Thuringia Service Unit, which was set up as a result of the state government having decided to reserve 1% of the land in Thuringia to the deployment of wind energy. The Unit ensures equal engagement with all stakeholders and related projects. The experience shows that mayors, interested in pursuing wind energy projects, tend to be under-informed regarding the opportunities and societal benefits of wind energy. The service unit currently has about 50 contracts with developers and first results are showing. They are a neutral player and mediator without any economic interest and are trusted by citizens, as funding comes directly from the state government. The service unit has established five criteria for a fair wind energy label which is controlled every six months and also takes into account feedback from citizens as well as what developers report. It also provides transparent information to citizens and as a result more educated dialogues are taking place between developers and local citizens.

Catherine Mitchell, Professor at University of Exeter, shared insights into the situation in the UK where the national government has set an ambitious net-zero emissions target by 2050. However, onshore wind energy is showing no significant signs of growth currently as it is effectively banned from taking part in auctions, as result of an earlier government decision.

“We bring information to the people, so that they can talk to developers with a good level of knowledge” – Dieter Sell, ThEGA

There are exceptions related to small-scale projects, which feature some degree of community involvement, but support from the national government for larger scale projects is non-existent. Scotland however is a notable exception with its clear 2GW target for community-owned wind parks by 2030.

Having only recently passed an ambitious climate law to reach 100% renewables by 2050 for the Balearic Islands, Ferran Rosa, Director General for Energy and Climate Change, explained that it is the regional government which gives an overall target per island and that projects with community-based ownership structures are encouraged. The local councils of each island can then decide themselves where to install wind turbines, or other renewable energy technologies. On the islands, the acceptance of wind energy is subject to the special local context and necessity to provide a stable electricity supply. In fact, an entire island was left without electricity for three consecutive days because a power line broke in a tornado. This fact has significant impact on the acceptance of wind parks and the regional government’s overall policy.

The importance of clear regional targets was also underlined by Frank Sondershaus of the German Onshore Wind Agency who mentioned that on 11 June 2019 the parliament of the German state of Brandenburg decided that every new wind plant needs to financially benefit all municipalities within a 3000m radius. More concretely, a 10,000 Euro contribution per wind turbine is foreseen to go to affected municipalities and should be invested into measures which increase social acceptance.

As discussions had already touched upon criteria and targets for fair wind energy, the morning was concluded with a debate on whether European guidelines, or a European fair wind energy label would be feasible, and indeed, required. From the ThEGA Service Unit’s perspective it all depends on the context. Having a label for fair wind energy is important and can be also significantly beneficial to developers for raising their image and profile. However, the implementation of a label on a European scale is likely to be difficult as the regional and local contexts are bound to differ a lot. This would also influence the definition of what is actually “fair” in a given context. It should be acknowledged that citizens are starting to get confused by too many labels and that the process of developing an effective label takes time regardless of the scale it is being applied to. The most important point is that a label needs to be trustworthy and therefore has to be issued and regularly checked by a neutral organisation. The more international a label becomes, the more time intensive its implementation and the more labour intensive the monitoring process becomes. Labels are also a means for developers to increase their image.

The debate came to a conclusion with an agreement that any form of wind energy development should be part of a holistic transition agenda which incorporates different policy sectors. Too often it is only the opponents of wind energy projects who get most of the media attention. Citing the “Fridays for Future” movement, Frank Sondershaus calls for arguments in favour of fair wind energy to get more into the spotlight. Often big stories about the negative consequences of wind parks are being put out there, but only very small stories about the benefits (if at all). This needs to change.

The lunch break featured a “Market Place of Best Practices” where participants were able to engage with consortium partners on discussions regarding some of the WinWind best practice cases and reflect on how these would be applicable in the participant’s respective contexts.

World Café Session: Strengthening Social Acceptance - Best Practices from WinWind Regions

During the second half of the event Peter Defranceschi, Head of Brussels Office at ICLEI Europe, invited participants to reflect on three questions from their respective context in a rotating format. Interestingly, despite the difference in context many commonalities were identified.

What are the barriers and challenges to socially-inclusive wind energy?

- Unavailability of information, a lack of education and objective information about the benefits of wind energy, coupled with emotional opposition to wind turbines.
- Often, the opportunities and benefits are not clear to people who do not deal with wind energy on a professional basis. The provision of best practices showing positive examples of how to generate local value from wind energy is key. In many countries it is currently simply impossible to have co-ownership. Equal and fair distribution of benefits is just as important. If this is not the case, local value generation can also lead to more conflict in communities as only certain groups, e.g. land owners, profit from wind energy.
- In part this is also due to an unwillingness of some developers to allow the engagement of citizens in the planning and development process.
- In many cases there is a clear lack of opportunities to participate, or if there is, the procedure is very complex. Participation needs to happen already at the very beginning of the planning process.
- Fake news has been mentioned as a considerable barrier as it is mostly difficult to tackle large amounts of misinformation at a later stage.



What is the role of regional and local authorities?

Regional and local governments should be considered the “defenders of local interest” and facilitate fair participation by being the link between developers and local communities.

- They need to be well involved with the regional planning process in the first place. In some countries, spatial planning for wind turbines is outsourced to private sector companies, which lowers the degree to which the local government can facilitate broader stakeholder engagement.
- They should have a holistic policy making approach across different policy sectors to analyze the local needs. If value generated from wind parks is invested into local infrastructure and services, this can go a long way towards raising social acceptance.
- Local governments should cooperate to share the revenue generated from wind parks and make a clear link to social planning.
- Local and regional authorities need financial, personal, time as well as professional expertise on how to facilitate real participation of citizens, which should go beyond merely providing information, but should foster an effective participatory approach to planning open to all. Depending on national rules, municipalities can also increase local revenue through taxing developers.
- Dieter Sell mentioned that the role which participants envision, or dedicate to regional and local governments is, to a large extent, covered by the activities of the Thuringia Wind Energy Service Unit. The only thing the service unit needs most is more (financial) support.

Taking into account the European Union’s ambition that the clean energy transition must be fair and socially acceptable to all, what could be principles and criteria for fair wind energy?

Having been already touched upon during the first half the workshop, participants revisited the question of having criteria for fair wind energy.

The Thuringian guidelines for fair wind energy served as a basis and resonated throughout the different groups. A key discussion point revolved around the question of who should be the promoter of such criteria. Depending on the local context, it might be either the municipality, or a dedicated service unit acting as a neutral player. There was a general understanding that the criteria should emphasize the common good and should be an effective tool for visibly promoting more socially inclusive wind energy deployment. Of course, provided that adequate financial and human resources are in place to oversee proper application of the criteria.

The Thuringian guidelines, which resonated across the board, are:

- Inclusion of all interested stakeholders near the wind park during the entire project implementation phase.
- Safeguarding transparency of information relevant to the project and provision of support and information services.
- Fair participation of all affected parties and residents including also those who do not live in direct proximity of the wind park.
- Inclusion of the regional energy provider and banks.
- Creation of possibilities for direct financial participation.

The event was concluded with an outlook towards the policy session “Speed up the energy transition by raising social acceptance” held on 19 June during the European Sustainable Energy Week.

EUSEW Policy Session:

Speed up the energy transition by raising social acceptance

Panelists:

Lutz Ribbe, Member of TEN Section at European Economic and Social Committee

Dörte Fouquet, Director at European Renewable Energy Federation

Esther Bollendorf, Climate Justice and Energy Campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe

Alessandro Luè, Head of Unit at Poliedra – Politecnico di Milano

Markus Müller, President at Architects’ Chamber of Baden-Württemberg, Germany

Moderation:

Giorgia Rambelli, Coordinator Sustainable Resources, Climate and Resilience at ICLEI Europe

Carsten Rothballer, Coordinator Sustainable Resources, Climate and Resilience at ICLEI Europe

During the policy session, which covered social acceptance of renewables in general, speakers and participants agreed that a more democratic involvement and sharing of economic benefits is a highly effective way to increase social acceptance. Particularly, this entails an emphasis on keeping economic revenue from renewable energy installations in the region. Strong political commitment and target setting is therefore required and can facilitate an inclusive process where smaller and larger (market) actors can be brought together and potential conflicts mediated. A national target for community energy and the right regulatory framework specifically have been shown to be crucial in this regard. Especially, to allow community energy actors to compete on a level-playing field with larger players. An active leadership role taken up by a community leader, such as a mayor, can also have a profound effect on guaranteeing a project’s success. While the recent changes in EU legislation have the potential to be a game changer for consumers and energy cooperatives alike, conflict mediation will remain an important issue and adequate financial resources and capacity needs to be made available to better operationalize stakeholder participation in project implementation and permitting procedures specifically. But also technical expertise and capacity need to be sufficiently to ensure that socially-inclusive projects can be carried out in the first place. Much emphasis needs to be put on awareness raising in general as the economic local benefits of renewables needs to be properly communicated. The role of civil society in doing so was reiterated during the discussion. The panel concluded with a joint understanding that, given the positive effects renewables can have on the local economy, there is a large interest among European citizens to take part in the democratization of the energy supply, but adequate support from the political and administrative levels in essential and needs to be provided.

www.winwind-project.eu
info-winwind@PolSoz.FU-Berlin.de
 [@winwind_eu](https://twitter.com/winwind_eu)  WinWind project

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