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Policy Brief #3: Local Governments Drive Social Acceptance – Support Them!



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Raising social acceptance of wind energy can only be achieved if an effective interplay of stakeholders and organizations is guaranteed. With frictions related to wind energy mostly manifesting themselves on the local level, very often it is local governments that deal with heated discussions on wind energy, be this in the local councils, or in dialogue with concerned citizens. Throughout the EU, it can be seen that a socially inclusive wind energy project typically does not come into existence without clear involvement of the local government. Due to their proximity and closeness, municipal decision-makers are often trusted more than external actors. Social acceptance of wind energy therefore strongly depends on the attitude and engagement of local governments. They are the key actors driving fair and socially inclusive wind energy forward.

This policy brief builds upon the key outcomes of WinWind's six national policy roundtables, which were held as part of the project's ongoing stakeholder dialogue. These roundtables served to collect good examples and to bring together key decision makers influencing policy and legislation, such as senior government officials and local practitioners, to facilitate policy solutions to specific local challenges related to the deployment of onshore wind energy.

More Attention to Local Governments in NECPs

With the publication of the EU Clean Energy Package, the European Commission has reiterated that the energy transition must be fair and socially acceptable for all. This was also a core aspect to be included by Member States in their draft National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs). Member States have to comply with the provisions set out in the revised renewable energy directive (RED II) which, among other provisions, enshrines the right of renewable energy communities in European law and also calls upon Member States to create an enabling framework providing “non-discriminatory participation of small actors and, where applicable, local authorities” to participate in the tendering procedures for renewable energy. A brief

assessment of the draft NECPs of the Member States represented in the WinWind consortium (Germany, Italy, Latvia, Poland and Spain) revealed, however, that national targets and strategies do not always reflect the key position of local governments as drivers of a socially inclusive energy transition. This is in spite of the huge success and increasing membership of the Covenant of Mayors initiative. There are also considerable differences in how local governments are involved through consultation procedures if at all.

As the final NECPs are scheduled to be submitted to the European Commission by 31 December 2019, this policy brief aims to provide a clear and easy overview of why local governments and their efforts must be acknowledged better in the NECPs and it

explains why it is crucial that the right kind of regulatory and financial enabling frameworks are created in the different Member States to maximise local governments' potential for contributing to socially-inclusive wind energy deployment. This policy brief therefore showcases the roles of local governments, the support they need for taking up this role and, in doing so, enhancing and highlighting the potential of stronger synergies between European, national and local efforts via the NECPs with a particular focus on fair wind energy.

The Role of Local Governments for Fair Wind Energy

As an underlying theme of discussion, the national policy roundtables have demonstrated that the local and regional level are most effective for promoting social acceptance. While the actions carried out at the local level sometimes differ depending on the respective context, local governments can play several distinct roles, acting as: **Leaders, Planners, Informers, Enablers and Mediators** for fair onshore wind energy. Each role entails a range of tasks and responsibilities that local governments are taking up and that can (positively) affect social acceptance. To help providing policy makers with a quick overview of why local governments are crucial for raising social acceptance, these actions and roles can be streamlined into a few simple categories:

Leaders and Mediators:

Any major measure or policy change is accelerated if clear targets are set and there are leaders to push for it. This can be observed, for example, in cases where local mayors are key for accelerating a project as demonstrated in the Polish town of Kisieliece where the mayor took it on himself to “carry” the wind energy project further despite initial setbacks. An active leadership role taken up

Key outcomes of the WinWind roundtables:

- The EU Clean Energy Package should form the backbone of reinforced multi-level governance between the EU, Member States and regional/local governments. The WinWind policy roundtables have highlighted the need for “fair play” as there exists considerable willingness of the local level to facilitate socially inclusive solutions for wind energy e.g. through renewable energy communities. National tendering procedures must be adapted accordingly to reflect the promising ambitions as laid out in RED II. Having a stable regulatory framework in place concerning wind energy is key for allowing local governments to carry fair wind energy forward.
- Through the drafting, finalization and implementation of the NECPs, a **continuous dialogue** should be established and institutionalized between different levels of government and across stakeholders to facilitate the implementation of policies and actions fit for purpose on the ground
- There is a strong need for strengthening the capacity of local and regional governments to promote “genuine” participation of the local community in the siting of wind turbines.
- Financial capacity to establish intermediary organisations providing neutral advice/independent expertise to municipalities and citizens should be allocated on a regional or national level.

by a community leader, such as a mayor, can have a profound effect on guaranteeing a project's success. If a leadership figure in the local government is motivated to carry the project further, this sets the foundations for and provides impetus for all the actions following. The local government has a key role in leading the community towards a vision of a better future, and by engaging directly it can embed these actions within it. Regulatory measures, plans and programmes can thus be implemented much faster and potential funding setbacks overcome much more effectively.

Leadership also goes beyond guidance and can involve local governments becoming "leaders by example", for example by financially engaging as shareholders in a community wind farm, signalling the trustworthiness of the entire project and process. In Germany, the municipality of Neuenkirchen obtained shares of 20, 000 Euros, which was the maximum legally allowed, to show its commitment to the project and the trustworthiness of the initiators.

In their capacity as leaders, local governments frequently serve as, or set up, the necessary exchange platform between developers and citizens. Local governments, sometimes in cooperation the local/regional energy agency, can gather together opponents and proponents of wind energy to engage in constructive dialogue. This happens in addition and is, in some cases, reinforced by local and regional support units being set up to facilitate the process.

- **Having an overall stable regulatory framework at national level, providing for a clear commitment towards developing onshore wind, goes a long way in**

encouraging more local key stakeholders to take up a leadership role.

- **If national regulations are clear, stable and favourable more local governments will be willing to "lead by example" and co-invest in community wind farms.**

Planners:

Local governments build the conditions for good participation of all relevant stakeholders and, in cooperation with regional planning authorities, are well placed for creating local energy strategies as they have the best understanding on how a particular wind energy project might affect the community. Many local governments, sometimes in cooperation with the regional/local energy agency, actively involve local citizens in the development of local energy plans, or wind park concepts, and often also are land owners themselves with a significant say in the design and the hosting of a project. While mandates and responsibilities, for instance regarding spatial planning, depend on the national context, as it has been shown during the Latvian roundtable, there is an increasing willingness across the board to harmonize local energy plans with regional plans. Many local governments are increasingly making proposals to national/regional planning authorities on where and why a wind park would be beneficial to the community. This helps ensuring that fair wind energy projects can be developed while maintaining the overall appeal of the greater landscape as well as reconciling the interests of wind energy development and tourism. Local governments, through inter-municipal cooperation, are also carrying out joint planning procedures, as in the case Gran Canaria where local governments have formed an association to perform a technical feasibility analysis in cooperation with the University de las Palmas to build a water

desalination plant powered by electricity from wind turbines. In the Polish case, the town of Kisielice, encouraged by the mayor, made an amendment to the local spatial development plan to allow wind turbines to be placed on agricultural land.

- Local governments should have more say in the designation of wind priority zones in member states where their planning competences are limited.

Informers:

Any plan, be it national, or regional, for a fair wind energy project is only as good as the communication around it. Informing local decision-makers and citizens about the possibilities for participating in the discussion as early as possible is key. Local governments are placed best as they have the most immediate connection with the local people and are easily approachable. Many local governments acknowledge this fact and go above and beyond what is required in terms of formal, statutory participation as prescribed e.g. by the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive. They often facilitate informal, transparent and open planning processes involving all stakeholders, and organize information events, either general ones for the whole community, or smaller, target group specific events. Not only do these kind of events offer the opportunity to engage in discussion with developers and the local government, they are also an important tool for informing citizens about opportunities for financial participation through community ownership models, as well as to highlight how the community, as a whole, benefits from the wind park through fiscal measures and the establishment of dedicated funds.

- While an analysis across 10 best practices, identified within the WinWind project, has indeed shown a correlation between a higher number of informal

information events and an increase in social acceptance of local wind energy projects, it goes without saying that this comes with a higher cost to local governments, which need to allocate more budget to these activities and often require more financial support by the member states and European funding programmes.

In Gran Canaria the inter-municipal association invested heavily in an information campaign through posters, promotional videos as well as radio stations where the prospect of having a wind park was openly discussed. Particularly schools have been approached to educate locals from an early age about the need for renewables. In order to further increase trust in the development process, local governments are increasingly cooperating with neutral regional advisory organisations including service units and similar organisations.

Enablers:

Going beyond a planning and informing role, local governments increasingly act as enablers and promoters of community-led wind farms where citizens can act as shareholders. This can take various forms, but most prominently local governments, often push to establish a wind park in such a legal entity which allows for citizens to hold shares and limit liability and financial risks. In order to keep the process fair, the maximum of shares each shareholder can hold, should be set very low allowing more citizens to jump on board without requiring too much in terms of individual capital investment. Local governments also increasingly choose to own a certain share in renewable energy communities with citizens having the majority stake. Participation by the municipality itself results in a very organic process and projects can easily even become cultural assets in the

community. Owned by local shareholders, the whole community feels responsible for, and identifies with the wind farm. Local governments also have an institution-building function such as the creation of civic associations, or local foundations in order to make the local community benefit from wind farms. In the case of three community wind farms in Schleswig-Holstein, which are mainly in the ownership of local farmers, land owners and citizens land lease pooling models were developed allowing also land owners, whose land was not identified for turbine installations to benefit from land lease payments. In one case a system was set up to feed 1% of the annual remuneration to a local non-profit organization. In the other cases a community foundation was developed to support energy-saving measures for the local community. In Thuringia local governments are supported in such activities by a dedicated service unit for wind energy which, among other tasks, provides advice on possibilities for action to local governments free of charge and helps to mediate any potential conflicts in cooperation with the local government. The service unit is financed through funds from the Thuringian state government as well as through the European Regional Development Fund.

- In order to support local governments to act as enablers for socially-inclusive wind energy there is a need for strong and continuous policy commitment and support as well as qualified, dedicated staff and especially funding.

Conclusions:

Local governments increasingly understand the added value wind parks can bring to the community if implemented in a socially inclusive manner. A stable and **favourable regulatory framework** for community

participation, the sharing of economic benefits and the promotion of community (co)-ownership of wind energy projects needs to be guaranteed. This should also include concrete targets for socially inclusive renewable energy deployment.

- National schemes for renewable energy should include, and take into account the specific conditions of renewable energy communities in order to guarantee them a fair access to the benefits as well as to allow local governments to buy in part of the shares.

While the roles described above do indeed highlight how local governments are driving socially inclusive wind energy forward, it should be reiterated that there are still considerable differences between the EU Member States. As such, there are certain key enabling factors in place which govern how effectively local governments can take up said roles. These factors could be that some countries have a long tradition in place of energy communities and energy democracy, or a willingness between the national/regional and local-level authorities to discuss the siting of wind turbines in sensitive areas in the first place.

The financial capacity of local governments also differs between Member States. While some might indeed have the financial and human resource capacity to carry out non statutory information meetings, this is not always the case.

- The specifications laid down in RED II should therefore be considered as a baseline to make sure that adequate financial resources can be made available to local governments throughout the EU. European funding programmes (European Regional Development Fund, Horizon Europe, Cohesion Fund etc.) should scale up their support for investment into decentralised energy infrastructure.
- Adequate monitoring should be in place to surveil if financial capacity being allocated accordingly in Member States.

Raising social acceptance of onshore wind energy is a key solution to driving the European energy transition forward. Member states have much to gain from strongly incorporating and acknowledging the important role of local governments as part of their NECPs. Taking into account an earlier proposal by the European Parliament to create “**Multilevel Climate and Energy Dialogue Platforms**”, Member States would be able to profit even more extensively from already existing examples of how local governments give shape to above mentioned roles and to build on ambitious Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs).

