

Community Wind Farms in Schleswig Holstein, Germany

In the German State of Schleswig Holstein, which can be regarded as the cradle of (community) wind energy in Germany, three community wind farms have been initiated by local farmers and land owners: Ellhöft, Grenzland Vindtved and Neuenkirchen. Focusing on citizen participation and ownership, they illustrate that policy and corporate measures can contribute to community acceptance and make wind farm developments more accessible and fair.

Motivation:

The main motivation of the initiators was to avoid the involvement of external investors and to make sure that the entire community would benefit from the wind farm, not only the land owners and founding shareholders.

Challenges:

In the case of Ellhöft and Grenzland Vindtved there was a high level of local support from the start. In Neuenkirchen, however, a local citizen group mobilized to address its concerns particularly about the visual impact, high density of wind turbines resulting in noise pollution, and the impact of aviation lighting.

Impacts and results:

To gain local acceptance the initiators in Neuenkirchen maintained a policy of open and transparent information, encouraging citizen involvement in the planning process. Furthermore, the mayor played an active role as facilitator and mediator.

Citizens had the opportunity to buy shares and participate directly as limited partners, which helped to ensure citizen support and emotional identification with the projects. To avoid conflicts with land owners neighbouring the project, land lease pooling models were created. The local business tax revenues and local job creation led to a high level of general community support.

In each of the three cases, the operators implemented measures to mitigate the negative impacts on landscape and nature, such as the creation of a local nature protection association or the replacement of older turbines via repowering.



Lessons learned:

Social acceptance: Local ownership, active and passive financial participation, credibility of actors, trust, emotional identification with the project, community benefits, transparent, inclusive decision-making.

Transferability: Community wind farms have been successfully developed in other European countries, and in general, transferability is high. However, high transaction costs for collective decision-making, the administration of a large membership and the financial capabilities of small community-based actors might pose barriers. Lack of enabling policy and legal frameworks, effective support schemes, or different socio-cultural values can also hamper the transfer of the concept.

