

Service Unit Wind Energy & Fair Wind Energy Label, Thuringia, Germany

In 2015, a Wind Energy Service Unit was set up in Thuringia, Germany by the state's Energy and GreenTech Agency (ThEGA). The unit provides free advice to municipalities, citizens and developers and aims to restore trust in wind energy projects by promoting fair and more transparent planning and decision-making procedures. The "Thuringian model" helps to increase community benefits of wind energy and strengthen local value creation.

Motivation:

The Service Unit aims to improve the relationship between developers, communities and citizens, to enhance active and passive financial participation of communities and citizens in wind energy projects and to support municipalities who often face time, informational and staff constraints.

Challenges:

At its start, the initiative faced a situation of distrust as the distribution of the costs and benefits of wind energy had been perceived as unfair in the past. Citizens felt uninformed and unheard due to a lack of procedural participation and complex planning and permitting procedures, and there was often a knowledge and information gap between the professional developers and the municipal decision-makers.

To overcome these imbalances, the Service Unit promoted measures to achieve a fairer distribution of the benefits of wind energy (e.g. through early and pro-active advice and assistance to municipalities, through active and passive financial participation of host communities), with the purpose to ensure a level playing field between developers and communities and to strengthen local value and job creation.

Impacts and results:

The Service Unit was able to enhance trust by increasing procedural participation, providing more direct and better information to stakeholders, and by fostering constructive dialogue between stakeholders.

The Service Unit also issues a label to developers that commit themselves to voluntarily adhere to certain minimum standards addressing procedural and financial participation of citizens and communities.



Lessons learned:

Social acceptance: The measures support the development of trust, procedural and distributional fairness, which are key drivers of community acceptance. In several cases, a more balanced distribution of costs and benefits between developers on the one side and communities and citizens on the other side was achieved.

Transferability: Transferability in this case can be regarded as high. However, any transfer has to take into account regional characteristics and the institutional context. Several German states have been inspired by the work of the Service Unit and have created similar advisory structures (Brandenburg) or labelling systems (Schleswig-Holstein). The Thuringian model itself was inspired by a similar service unit established in the district of Steinfurt in 2011.

