

The limits of public participation for complex policy problems

- exemplary reasoning in the area of energy decisions

Ulrike Bechtold

Institute of Technology Assessment

Harald Wilfing

Research Group Human Ecology

Overview

- Green energy transition & levels of involvement
- Commons & (public) participation
- Limits
- Practise: experiences from implementation processes of windparks

Green energy transition & levels of involvement

- EU - The 2020 climate and energy package:
 - The "20-20-20" targets, set three key objectives for 2020

http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/package/index_en.htm

Green energy transition & levels of involvement

- National
 - Accordingly all national plans contain a comprehensive proposition
- Regional
 - Positions are already varying (depending on respective context & occasion)
- Local
 - Tangible conflicts of interests (NIMBY, financial interests)

Green energy transition & levels of involvement

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Green energy transition & levels of involvement

- Aarhus Convention

Article 1:

In order to contribute to the protection of the right of every person of present and future generations to live in an environment adequate to his or her health and well-being, each Party shall guarantee the rights of access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters in accordance with the provisions of this Convention.

<http://www.unece.org/env/pp/treatytext.html>

What is expected from (public) participation

- Legitimation of processes
- Diverse knowledge of participants
 - Experts of the practice
- Information and learning processes

CHALLENGES & LIMITATIONS for (public) participation

1

- Individual freedom vs. common interest/sustainability
 - Aesthetics of wind energy plants as a killer argument (infinite dicourse)

CHALLENGES & LIMITATIONS

1



Source: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windpark_Westereems

CHALLENGES & LIMITATIONS

2

- Decreasing public interest vs. experts of the practice and „proxy fights“
 - Colin Crouch: Coping with Postdemocracy (2000)
 - Experts of the practice are prone to
 - Local history (lock in, path dependency)
 - Irrationalities

CHALLENGES & LIMITATIONS

2 cd.

- Decreasing public interest vs. experts of the practice and „proxy fights“
 - Participatory processes advancing wind energy plants (WEPs) serve as arenas for „proxy fights“
 - AEE 2014: experiences with WEPs increase public acceptance

CHALLENGES & LIMITATIONS

3

- Can participatory processes deal with „false truths“
 - Subsonic noise
 - Bird strike

CHALLENGE „false truths“: subsonic noise

3a

- WEPs produce (100-250 m distance) max. 50-70dB
 - per doubling minus 6 dB
 - minimum distance to residential area 500m
- No scientific proof which connects physical effects to WEPs
- other significant sources: e.g. sitting in a car, waves
Metastudy: <http://www.wind-ist-kraft.de/grundlagenanalyse/durch-wea-verursachte-infraschall-emissionen/4/>
- Crichton et al. 2014: Nocebo effect

CHALLENGE „false truths“: bird strike

3b

USA/a (2012)

- Buildings: 970 mio.
- Power lines: 175 mio.
- Misapplied pesticides: 72 mio.
- Communication Towers: 6,6 mio.
- Gas/oil waste pits: 1 mio.
- WEP's: 573,000

Negin 2013

Conclusions

- These limits display an enormous power to disturb and corrupt participatory processes ahead to the realisation of wind energy plants
 - Process level
 - Methodological level

Conclusions: process level 1

- Sustainability is at risk
- Green energy transition is at risk

- Risk: participatory approaches are abused
- Risk: participatory approaches are obliterated

Conclusions: process level 2

WHY ?

- Energy plans are taken for granted BUT on the local/regional level concrete measures are prone to discourse and conflict
 - Regional/local authorities face a threefold challenge
 - Contribute to the (supra)national quotas
 - Increasing demand of mandatory participation
 - Deal with local histories (path dependencies & lock-ins), goal conflicts, prejudices and irrationalities – “proxy fights” fought on the level of participation

Conclusion: methodological level

- Larger participatory processes as i.e. WWViews can help:
 - NUMBER: Quantity allows to identify tendencies
 - FACILITATING: Small groups, guided by a facilitator
 - STRUCTURE: Individual participant has no “plenary power”
 - Large plenary processes may provide too much room to individual sensitivities, false truths



Thank you for your attention!

Contact:

Dr Ulrike Bechtold

A-1030 Vienna, Strohgasse 45/5

Tel: +43 (1) 51581 65xx

Fax: +43 (1) 7109883

Email: xxx@oeaw.ac.at

WWW: www.oeaw.ac.at/ita

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