

## Conference on Public Participation:

**State of the art approaches to stakeholder engagement in electricity infrastructure projects**

**Brussels, 25 January 2017, 10am – 5pm**

### Summary

10:00 Welcome

Stefano Maran | RSE and project coordinator of INSPIRE-Grid

Richard Hampton | project officer at the European Commission

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10:15 Icebreaker/ networking exercise

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10:30 Introduction to INSPIRE-Grid's main lessons learned

Leonhard Späth | ETH Zurich

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11:00 State of the art approaches to stakeholder engagement:

- Patrick Devine-Wright | University of Exeter
  - Ursula Hillbrand | Secretariat-General, European Commission
  - Giulia Molinengo, Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies e.V. (IASS) (on Demo Project with TenneT)
  - Ivar Lyhne | University of Ålborg
  - Alberto Eugenio Pirni | Scuola Superiore S'Anna Pisa
  - Peter Gosslar | Buergerinitiative für HGÜ-Erdkabel, Bad Gandersheim ("Citizens for hvdc underground cables")
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12:45 World café: introduction of discussion topics

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14:00 World café

- Integration of formal and informal participation – moderation PIK
  - Participatory decision-making methods – moderation Poliedra
  - Outlook I: (How) can social science research interact with real life projects to learn more about potential of stakeholder participation? – moderation ETH Zurich
  - Outlook II: What are future areas of research interest? – moderation RSE
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16:15 Presentation of world café results

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16:45 Wrap up and outlook

The Conference, that attracted more than 50 participants from academia, TSOs, civil society and politics, kicked off with welcoming words from the coordinator of INSPIRE-Grid, RSE's Stefano Maran, and the officer responsible for the project at the European Commission, Richard Hampton.

Stefano Maran explained the rationale of the project – the fact that electricity grids are widely seen as enabler of the energy transition and the internal energy market, but often face opposition when planned and built locally. Thus, the INSPIRE-Grid project that was funded under the EU's seventh research framework programme (FP7), brought together professionals from different fields – both TSOs and researchers from different fields, such as engineering, social science and psychology - to contribute to addressing this challenge.

Richard Hampton stressed the importance of research projects the EU is supporting in the field of the energy transition. Projects deal for example with grid development, the integration of renewables, better control and storage of electricity, new business models and future roles of different actors, such as customers, prosumers, or DSOs and TSOs. The Commission fully acknowledges the fact that all changes related to the energy transition will not be possible without the active engagement of stakeholders and the public.

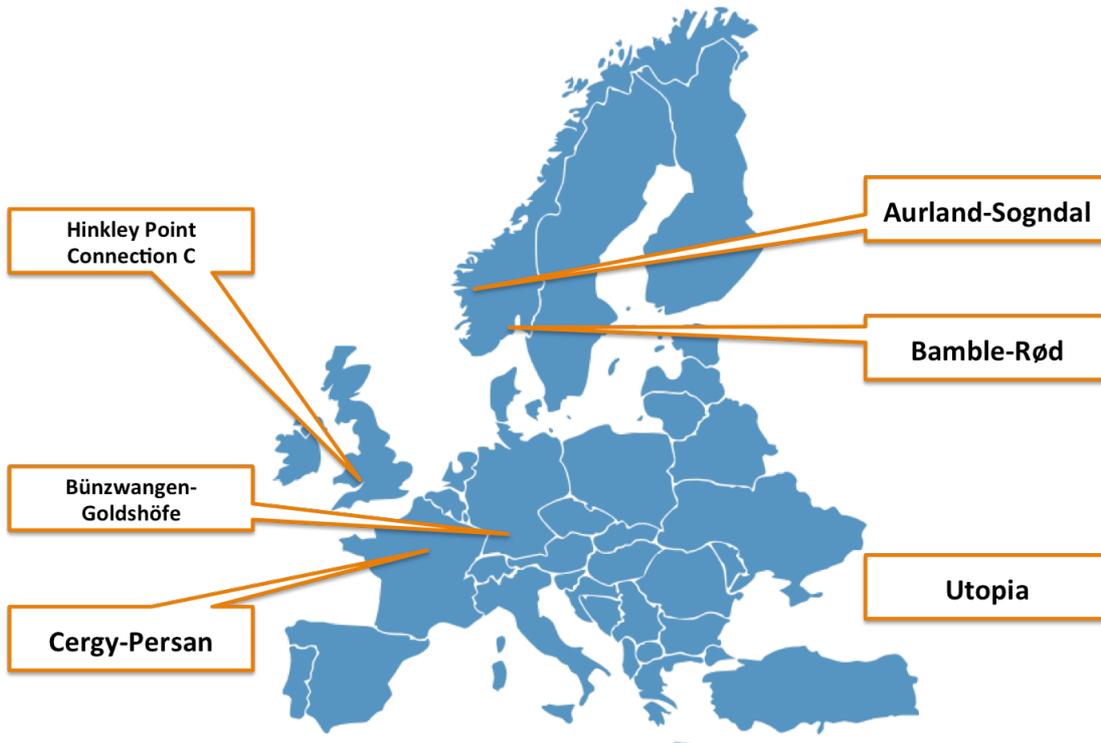
### **Introduction to INSPIRE-Grid's main lessons learned**

#### **Leonhard Späth | ETH Zurich**

After a short networking exercise, Leonhard Späth from ETH Zurich presented more findings and lessons learned of the project INSPIRE-Grid.

The main starting point of the project was the assumption that participation during grid planning and permitting procedures helps to handle the challenges raised by opposition because a) it brings more (local) knowledge into the project and thus in the end leads to a better (route) planning; b) it legitimises the process; and c) it is democratically 'right' to do so.

During the course of the project, the consortium developed a theoretical and methodological framework, identified and demonstrated new or improved approaches to stakeholder engagement and suggested practical measures to build stakeholders' support for new infrastructure. Data was collected and different methods and approaches were tested in three case studies in Norway and France (Aurland-Sogndal, Bamble-Rød, Cergy-Persan) and findings were validated in workshops in the UK, Germany and Italy, using existing projects (Hinkley Point C Connection, section F) or through role-play games and simulations based on the fictitious case of "Utopia" (see D7.2 and D7.3).



Overview: three case studies and three validation workshops in INSPIRE-Grid

Lessons learned of the projects can be summarised according to three main challenges:

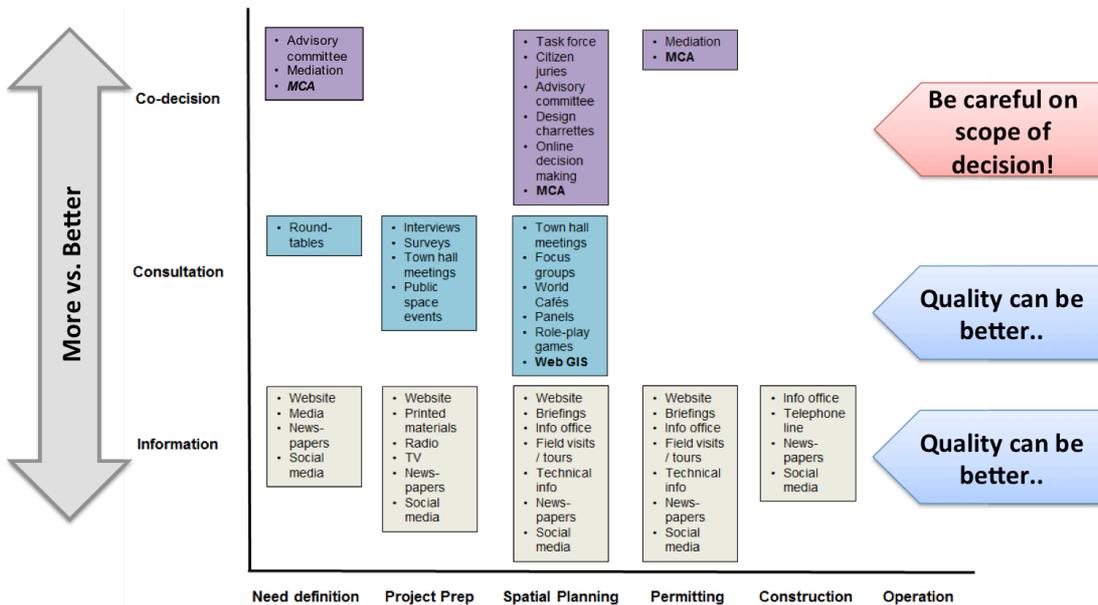
**1. Addressing stakeholder expectations and the importance of trust**

While mapping different concerns and needs of various stakeholder groups and categorizing them into six areas (well-being, social aspects, politics, (socio-) economy, technology and ecology), it became obvious that not all of them are fully addressed and represented in the formal planning process. Thus, other rooms, tools and opportunities that allow the integration of these concerns are needed. A second aspect that the consortium found out was the importance of trust. Trust has several dimensions, including the trust into institutions, more generalized trust into society and the interpersonal trust. The case studies carried out in INSPIRE-Grid showed the role of time dedicated to individual stakeholders to raise trust. The findings also emphasised the role of the project leader as an interface between individual stakeholders and a wider system of institutions.

**2. Better use of participatory decision-making methods**

The three methods elaborated and tested during the project comprised multi-criteria analysis (MCA), web-based geographical information system (Web GIS) and Life-cycle analysis (LCA). The MCA, a formalised method to reach synthesis conclusions regarding the choice among alternatives, considering conflicting criteria, was tested in INSPIRE-Grid by means of three validation workshops and two case studies, verifying that MCA can foster stakeholder participation and can be used to properly understand conflicts and support the choice of a compromising alternative. The Web GIS, a geographical information system accessible through the web that allowed the public to access project documentation more effectively, send comments with a spatial reference and express preferences. The Web GIS was tested in five workshops, showing that it is considered useful to communicate spatial preferences and to send comments, but inhibits challenges regarding the representativeness of the responding people and the possible biases in the answers. It is only relevant if preferences are used directly in the decision making process. The LCA, a method to calculate the comprehensive ecological impact of a new power line, was tested in a stakeholder workshop in France with the outcome that the method can help to evaluate the need for grid development. However, since the

output is rather complex, it requires expert knowledge to fully understand all aspects and its results are difficult to communicate to a non-specialist audience. Based on the fieldwork, the consortium developed an overview of different methods tools that are available for a better integration of stakeholders throughout different project stages:



*Methods available to engage stakeholders in planning process*

Findings showed that methods in the lower levels of engagement, such as information and consultation, are very effective if applied sufficiently. However, the practical execution often leaves room for quality improvement here. This is why practitioners are recommended to work on the quality of their methods instead of aiming for deeper levels of engagement including co-decision methods because very often expectations are raised that actually cannot be fulfilled in the course of the process.

**3. Untapping potentials of stakeholder participation**

Workshops with stakeholders and project developers showed that understanding the reasons why a power line is actually needed is vital for its acceptability. Thus, the consortium suggests that further development of a societal dialogue about the energy transition is a core building block for the improvement of support. This dialogue should include addressing the “system question” – what kind of future electricity system do we strive for?

Issues that were found throughout the project and would need further investigations, discussions and research, included: how to keep planning costs low, how to control the quality of stakeholder engagement, how to bridge the gap between national political decisions and local implications, how to harmonise planning procedures on different levels and in different countries and how can improved stakeholder engagement fit into regulatory schemes.

During the Q&A session that followed the presentation, the two main issues were raised:

Country focus: many projects, including INSPIRE-Grid, focus on Western European countries. More experience and testing of assumptions and findings in Central and Eastern Europe would be beneficial since more and more challenges regarding acceptance arise there as well.

Participation dilemma: while it is true that the need definition phase is vital for the further process, people very often only get involved if they realise that a pylon will be built close to their home.

However, it can be seen that opening up discussions during the need definition and actively involving organised stakeholders then can help to tackle this issue since professional stakeholders, such as (environmental) NGOs can serve as multipliers that bridge this gap by making sure that procedures are fair and transparent and adding credibility. However, discussions on the broader energy policy framework are still often lacking and a stronger involvement of politicians both on the national level, but also on local level and in concrete projects could be supportive.

### **State of the art approaches to stakeholder engagement**

#### **Patrick Devine-Wright, University of Exeter**

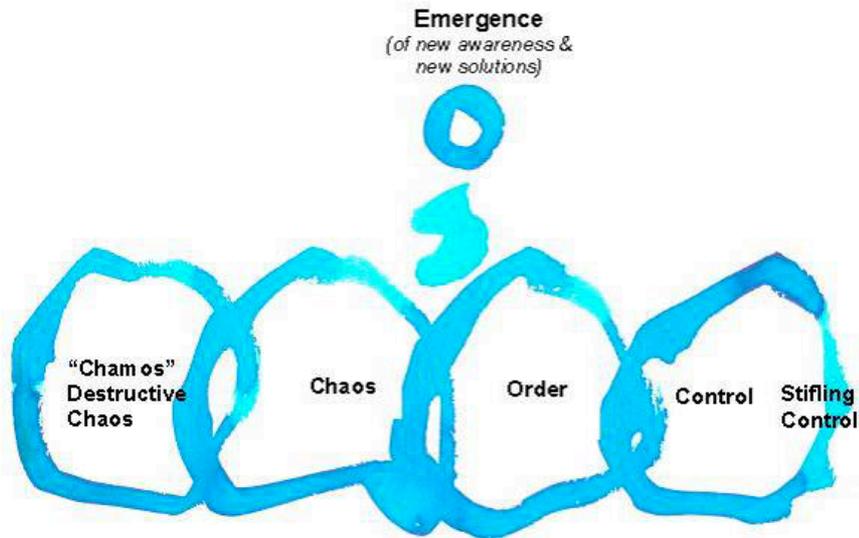
Professor Patrick Devine-Wright, presented his insights into landscape concerns in the countryside that he gained in two different research studies. He encouraged project developers to put more focus on the local environment they are building infrastructure in. In the UK and Ireland, the concept of the countryside is very much rooted in the culture. It is seen as something where stressed urbanites go to and find tranquillity. This idea is very old and was already institutionalised in the Country Planning Act from 1949. The problem of new power lines is that they bring part of the urban life – industry – to the countryside.

The first study presented was conducted with focus groups in the UK and Norway of people living near power line proposals. It found that essentialisation is a core element of participants, i.e. they focused on the core elements of the countryside. Moreover, they put their own countryside above the general concept of the countryside/ other landscapes. Pylons are perceived as not compatible with landscape or even detrimental to the concept as such.

The second study focused on a rural town in South West England where a new power line is being planned. It found that there is a difference in the perception of the new proposal for longstanding residents in contrast to incomers. For longstanding residents with strong attachment to the town, new pylons were already familiar features in the local area, and the countryside more generally. For incomers with strong place attachments, new pylons were objected to because of landscape and health impacts; and for incomers with weak place attachments, the pylons were met either with indifference, or objected to on grounds of procedural and distributional justice.

#### **Ursula Hillbrand, Secretariat-General, European Commission**

A couple of years ago, the Commission underwent a mind shift in their general approach towards stakeholder engagement. They realised that in a highly complex world with many stakeholders and many different contexts, cultures, attitudes and worldviews, they have to use the adequate tools. However, they had been using tools for simple solutions or complicated (based on expertise, such as studies). Shifting to more complex systems involved addressing the issue of allowing more chaos, but making sure that it would be positive and creative.



When people feel taken seriously, heard to and welcome to an authentic honest process with no fixed outcome, they offer and contribute with hearts and minds. This needs a set of practices, the knowledge of the field and context, a strategy, and an idea of the desired outcome without being pre-determined.

In the meantime, the Secretariat General has offered training for more than 2,000 people within the Commission on that subject and many more in member states.

### **Giulia Molinengo, Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies e.V. (IASS)**

Giulia Molinengo started off her presentation by hinting to the point that we have reached a stage where the “what” regarding participation does not have to be discussed in detail anymore, but rather the “how”. The different tools to be used are available, but the knowledge on how to best implement and use them is sometimes missing – what are the right conditions, actors to involve etc. are much more challenging questions. The hypothesis of Giulia Molinengo’s presentation was that we need to create rooms of shared power in order to make real progress in acceptance issues.

She has been part of a project that was implemented together with the German TSO TenneT in 2014 and 2015 and concerned the routing of a power line in Bavaria. TenneT together with the researchers developed a process that allowed for the development of different routing options together with different stakeholders. These suggestions developed were put into the formal application for the permitting process.

While the project as such was seen as a success, it also encountered some challenges. Many participants felt that the fact that the TSO was responsible for the process while also being the ones that want to build the line, was a constraint to the process. State authorities were rather reluctant to join the process since they did not want to get involved into the informal part while also being the one responsible for the formal decision in the end.

All involved in the project learned that you need to be very transparent in communicating about which points you can only inform on and which you truly want to cooperate on; and you should stick to this distinction throughout the process. Secondly, you need to decide at the beginning where you can devolve power and stick to this. Finally, it was vital that TenneT made concrete promises at the beginning and held to them throughout the project.

### **Ivar Lyhne, University of Ålborg**

Ivar Lyhne opened his presentation with the hint towards research that sometimes there is a tendency among researchers to look too much into methods instead of circumstances. The question of how we know which method to apply in which context is more urgent than the further

analysis of methods as such. He advocated for a dialogue between local communities, project developers and authorities to actually make this decision together, so that the participatory process is fully owned by all stakeholders from the very beginning. Ivar Lyhne stressed that this is not a top-down process, this needs to happen well before the official planning process starts and should address questions like how many resources do we have, how much time, what would like to achieve in the end etc.

Ivar Lyhne presented two projects he is involved in. One was a project together with the Danish TSO Energinet.dk on co-routing of a new power line. Landowners and local communities were invited to come together and jointly find routing alternatives. The second project focuses on the Environmental Impact Assessment and opportunities and limits of stakeholder engagement therein. A lot of the concerns the public has is not covered in the formal process of an EIA and the question how this dilemma can be solved is currently addressed in this project.

### **Alberto Eugenio Pirni, Scuola Superiore S'Anna Pisa**

Professor Pirni gave insights into a project he is realising together with RSE on the development of the transmission electricity grid. Main focus of the project is the analysis of trust and justice, in particular environmental justice. Basis of the project is the realisation that better information and communication alone will not lead to greater acceptability of new power lines since they are very often considered as pure persuasion tool. However, (distributive) justice proved to be particularly difficult to be taken into consideration when planning and managing energy-related infrastructures. The concept of environmental justice addresses this by pointing out that environmental injustices occur when unaccountable social agents externalise the environmental costs of their decisions and practices to third parties in circumstances when the affected parties, or their representatives, have no knowledge of or input in the ecological risk-generating decisions and practices.

The project builds on the assumption that conflicts, controversies and disputes are not merely shortcomings of infrastructural projects, but rather genuine expression of a disagreement and malfunctioning and thus deserve serious consideration and that citizens' opposition is not to be addressed merely by improving clarity of communication.

### **Peter Gosslar, Buergerinitiative für HGÜ-Erdkabel, Bad Gandersheim ("Citizens for hvdc underground cables")**

Peter Gosslar has years of experience in the protest movement against grid projects. He shared his views on different concerns stakeholders have regarding new power lines. In his region, citizens are mainly concerned with impacts on nature and fear that even two projects – AC line Wahle-Mecklar – plus the DC underground cable of SuedLink would be realised in one region. He gave his analysis of different stakeholder views, among others:

- Protest groups: are in no way homogeneous; his group is not against the Energiewende, but is asking for more participatory decision-making procedures and underground cabling
- TSOs: are in the view of citizens groups only acting strictly based on what is prescribed in laws and sometimes are not willing to sufficiently cooperate
- Politics: have been very reluctant to listen to citizen groups; at the beginning also lack of knowledge on different technologies and rather averse to change

Peter Gosslar explained some basic conditions for good participation in his view – starting from an early dialogue to the involvement of external mediators and the development of compensation schemes. He ended his presentation with the acknowledgement that the formal procedure to plan new power lines in Germany has improved substantially in the past five years regarding openness, transparency and efficiency.

## World café discussions

### Table 1: Integration of formal and informal participation

#### Moderation: Andrzej Ceglarz, PIK

- Participants agreed that trust is important in grid development projects and is a result of many different aspects, e.g. the possibility for stakeholders to speak up or how the input they give is implemented into the decisions taken about the process and siting.
- Agreeing on the procedure and common rules of conduct at the beginning of the process is as important as following them throughout the process.
- For the distinction between formal and informal participation, the terms as such need to be understood first. Formal participation could be understood as everything that is regulated by official procedures and legally binding whereas informal would be everything that is not legally binding. However, it is also possible to understand it differently and consider perceived relationships between and among engaged stakeholders as informal participation.
- Participants acknowledged that stakeholder engagement getting more and more important for project developers and many don't see it as duty they have to do anymore, but rather as something integral to their work.
- People also shared that not only trust, but also passion of people involved in the process is important.

### Table 2: Participatory decision-making methods

#### Moderation: Simona Muratori, Poliedra

- The general agreement of the discussion was that, independently from methods used, it is better to start early in the process, ideally already during the scenario analysis.
- Main issues of the discussions at the table where the questions "Why we need methods? What do we expect from them?" Answers to these questions included issues around procedural justice, transparency and the feeling of stakeholders to be truly involved in the process.
- Methods must be context specific, dependent on the region, the stage of the process, the number of people involved etc.
- The issue of trust was discussed as well on many different levels, including the trust in scientists and the requirement for them to be clear to which point scientific results are based on subjective judgements.
- It is important to be clear about the outcome of the stakeholder involvement and how what people say makes a difference.
- Two challenges were identified during the discussion. More effective participation processes are often implemented on a smaller scale, with smaller groups and face-to-face dialogues, which is not always more resource consuming but raises a problem of inclusiveness. One possible strategy to address the issue of inclusiveness is to involve multipliers that bring information from top level down and vice versa. The second challenge is relative to the integration of innovative participation processes in the formal decision making procedure.

### Table 3: Outlook I: (How) can social science research interact with real life projects to learn more about potential of stakeholder participation?

#### Moderation: Leonhard Späth, ETH Zurich

Discussions on the third table focused on three main points: the role of scientists, the interaction between scientists and practitioners and additional contributions of social science.

- 1) Role of scientists
  - There are different kinds of scientists, from more traditional research to more action-research. The more you go toward action, the more you are dependent on windows of opportunity in real life projects. For action-research, scientists can act as catalysts and support the implementation of participatory processes.
- 2) Interaction between scientists and practitioners
  - When TSOs go to social scientists to cooperate, they frame the research, influence the criteria to look at. For some tasks, it might be more appropriate to involve consultants instead of scientists; however, scientists are often more free, independent and credible in their findings.
- 3) Merits of social scientist
  - Social scientists can contribute to cultural change within organisations and help to decomplexify communication

#### **Table 4: Outlook II: What are future areas of research interest?**

##### **Moderation: Antonio Negri, GSE**

- At the fourth table, participants confirmed that the issues that power line projects face are similar to other industries, in particular other linear infrastructure, e.g. highways and railroad and that lessons could be transferred to some extent.
- Discussion participants brought up the issue that Projects of Common Interest and the Connecting Europe Facility give a general frame for consultation; but it was criticised that the legislation only gives general suggestions that are not enough to be applied on local level and thus would need further guidelines.
- The need for more common, harmonised permitting procedures was stated – both on national level and internationally for interconnection between different countries.
- Participants pointed out that permitting authorities and regulators are crucial – so far, TSOs have been driver of change because they have strong commitment to build power lines; however, there is no similar commitment within authorities; they are perceived as more rigid.
- There is the need to practically implement what has been developed in research projects; while we have seen that projects such as INSPIRE-Grid and BESTGRID raise a common issues and suggest common results, there is a strong need to jointly implement this now.
- There is a need to have a common platform to regularly exchange experiences between practitioners, but also with scientists/ researchers from different fields.