

Key Takeaways

Workshop: Participatory approaches for meaningful public engagement

6-7 October 2022, Würzburg

Session 1: Stakeholder Engagement – Meaningful Communication and Participation

Spotlight on SuedLink – Engaging with a major European PCI project

Chris Göpfert, Thomas Wagner and Dierk Schönwald presented the learnings they have gathered from the stakeholder engagement process for Suedlink, a major PCI grid project running from the north to south of Germany and jointly developed by TransnetBW and TenneT. Originally planned as an overhead line project, the shift to underground cables came from lawmakers in response to opposition – this brought new technical and engagement challenges and opportunities.

Key takeaways of the discussion:

- We need to communicate that not all grid projects can be underground
- New digital transparency approach was a key success ([new planning and participation platform](#) that the public/affected stakeholders along the line can access live)
- Value of project employees, not professional PR experts, getting off the podium and talking to people in public dialogue sessions
- Agreement that public dialogue sessions was money well spent

What do stakeholders really want to talk about? Presenting Germanwatch's Argumentation Map

Germanwatch's Kirsten Kleis presented the [Argumentation Map](#), a project aiming to de-emotionalise and show the links between the arguments used by different civil society stakeholders on grid developments.

Key takeaways of the discussion:

- A benefit of this map is that diverse arguments at different levels (local, federal) are all visible together without the weighting of pros/cons
- Takeaway from discussions on the ground that fed into the map: perception of fairness is key to acceptance at all levels and comprehensive and early participation must continue

Panel discussion: Is more possible? – Towards more meaningful stakeholder engagement

Francisco Parada (REN), Jan Kostevc (ACER), Kirsten Kleis (Germanwatch) and Kilian Harbauer (Bürgerdialog Stromnetz) were moderated by Antonella Battaglini in a panel discussion.

Key takeaways of the panel:

- We need intersectoral, honest communication about the need for a new energy system and thus more grids/storage to protect the climate
- The role of emotion: we need to speak people's language, recognise that turning emotional responses to rationality requires patience
- Desire for more support from energy regulators and politicians to speed up processes and allow for more community benefits
- Role of TYNDP scenarios: some panellists want more public participation in their creation but recognise that the public interested in giving feedback may not be those affected directly by new projects.
- Support but lack of capacity for third parties (not TSOs or government) going into communities to get feedback on infrastructure planning
- Support for TSOs and NRAs sitting together and developing solutions at scale
- Supporting communities needs to be planned at a federal level because local authorities are overloaded, understaffed
- Desire for more scientific analysis showing benefits of citizen energy dialogues

Session 2: A new engagement process? – Dealing with higher pressures and less time

Responding to accelerated spatial planning: Do we need a new public participation timeline?

See powerpoint presentations for the following three inputs:

1. RGI on [German Easter package's opportunities for acceleration](#)
2. TransnetBW/TenneT on [Digital SuedLink innovations improving transparency, acceptance, and comfort for different groups of stakeholders](#)
3. DG Environment on [Spatial allocation and go-to areas](#)

World Café: Group work on how acceleration is going to change the engagement process

Café group 1: Digitalisation

Digital tools are increasingly part of stakeholder engagement strategies and could provide opportunities to make engagement processes more efficient. Ideas on how to utilise these tools to support accelerated timelines for grid infrastructure include:

- Digital tools must be layered and appeal to varied knowledge/technical levels
- All digital innovations TSOs use must complement, not replace, face-to-face engagement
- Digital tools must also follow in-person processes since digital forms (online townhalls, virtual reality, portals) are more passive and don't get stakeholders talking to each other
- Educating the public on the need for grids (online or not) would be better if we brought together DSOs, TSOs and authorities to share this work

Café group 2: Timelines

In a world of accelerated political timelines when it comes to renewable generation and related grid deployment, public participation processes need to be adjusted to these new realities – ideally without cutting any of the core elements. Ideas on how to deliver on this include:

- Dare to run more processes in parallel (e.g. environmental assessments and stakeholder engagement processes for the same grid project)
- Stop individual project approaches and bundle participation processes for renewable and grid projects in one region (also between TSO and DSO level)
- Embrace failure culture: we can't be perfect or play it safe! We should dare to be ambitious and potentially also present project plans to the public that are unfinished, which will likely help invite meaningful contribution and imagination capacity
- Collect relevant data in advance – with the help of a broad public, for example via a tool similar to [Open Street Map](#). This should ideally lead to standardised data collection and joint maps on regional, national and European levels
- Infrastructure officers or ministers, who make grid development their main priority, would be a big help
- We need to add the idea of urgency to publicly communicated narratives on the energy transition and think about new communication approaches, e.g. the French example of introducing electricity forecasts on the news (in the style of weather forecasts)

Café group 3: Nature

Accelerated timelines for renewables and grid deployment are topping agendas alongside calls for this infrastructure to deliver positive nature contributions. Ideas on how to bring the public along as we work to deliver on both of these include:

- To combine grid/energy infrastructure with restoration measures to create net positive impact, we need clear restoration and mitigation targets and identification of their spatial scope, dedicated budgets, structures that ensure effective and neutral information flows to local communities, as well as processes for monitoring, measurement and accountability
- If in 'renewables go-to areas' priority is given to built-up/artificial areas, special attention should be paid to stakeholder engagement and benefits for those communities
- Regulators needs to recognise and incentivise stakeholder engagement as an ongoing process throughout the operation of grids/energy infrastructure
- The capacity of competent authorities does not enable acceleration that takes nature into account: we need to strengthen human resources and trainings as well as aggregate offices to optimise procedures
- Big picture thinking: focus on populations of wildlife, not individual animals

Session 3: Field trip

TransnetBW and doctoral students from the University of Hohenheim presented first results on the HVDC underground cable impact on soils and crop production on-site in Guentersleben. Results will be published in the near future.

Session 4: Ensuring a fair energy transition by listening to local needs and creating community benefits

Community Benefits – Best Practice Examples from Ireland

Sinead Dooley and Jamie Moore (EirGrid) [presented EirGrid's Community Benefit Policy](#), part of their new Public Engagement Strategy.

Key takeaways of the discussion:

1. Fair representation and embedding the community at the center of the community benefit process is key to success
2. Strong results from activating passive citizens of the local community and engaging them in the discussions, including youth
3. There is a need for policies and regulations to incentivise TSOs to provide community benefits
4. Workshop participants discussed the potential of applying EirGrid's community benefits schemes to both small- and large-scale projects
5. There was strong interest in EirGrid's Energy Citizens Roadshow, aimed at local communities not affected directly by a grid project. Participants recognised its cost-effectiveness and positive impact, while discussing replication challenges in their national context

Simulation game: Developing an ideal community benefit plan

Key takeaways of the discussion:

- Fair representation of stakeholders in physical proximity to grid infrastructure is key when developing any community benefit approach
- Effective measures include open dialogue, data provision, and explaining the principles and the constraints of a project. This will not only enhance people's engagement but also tap into the valuable knowledge of local communities
- At the same time, it is important to constantly reflect on the process you have created and be ready to course-correct if needed.
- A wide spectrum of benefits can be offered according to the needs of the local communities: local job creation/procurement and trainings, measures to enhance and/or conserve the natural environment, building up local energy co-ops, and supporting/improving local community support structures or infrastructure.
- In the context of the spectrum of benefits, questions of service provision that could/should be provided by state governments were raised. Not making it a habit to replace state services should therefore always be carefully considered.
- Emphasising and expanding multi-functional electricity grid infrastructure is helpful, but this needs to be recognised and enabled by appropriate regulatory frameworks. Businesses and start-ups can provide a bank of technologically feasible solutions as well (these could be linked to agricultural solutions, forest management, restoration and many more).
- In the offshore environment, marine and biodiversity conservation should be at the core of community benefits schemes. However, it is challenging to identify communities beyond the grid landing points/coastal communities.
- Engagement with fishing communities and potential solutions need to be tailored to fit their needs (e.g. charging points for vessels, enhancing fishing facilities for onshore fishing communities and traditional fishers) – this can foster synergies and enhance public acceptance
- Throughout these discussions, participants kept coming back to challenge of needing new and effective narratives on the energy transition that resonate

with the wider public. In this context, questions of connecting community benefits with energy education were also raised.

- Other approaches that workshop participants discussed could be employed in creating local benefits are big picture coordination processes (where multiple infrastructure projects as well as related community benefits are coordinated at an early stage to create higher impact) as well as participatory budgeting.