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COASTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND THE ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS IN LOW-CARBON TRANSITIONS: A REPORT FROM LIVERPOOL, UK

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Citizen Engagement for Sustainability

Coastal sustainability transitions include radical transformations to the ways in which energy is produced and consumed. The coastal zone is now in focus for the considerable energy resources potentially available there, particularly renewable energy sources. In the UK, off-shore wind energy is rapidly growing, supplying an increasing share of the UK's total electricity requirement. £12.7bn (£11bn) was invested in 2016 in the construction of offshore and onshore windfarms in the UK, equivalent to almost half the year's

financial activity for total new wind power in the EU (Vaughan, 2017). Large scale investment of this type, and the local level projects involved require engagement with numerous stakeholders and users to increase their acceptability and legitimacy. Clear pathways of engagement are required to make participation work, and to ensure that projects are a success. Projects that offer multiple, stimulating, and meaningful, methods of engagement create numerous opportunities for individuals to 'buy-in' at various 'entry points' of energy projects. A wide ranging and well developed engagement plan can enable key stakeholders to become actively involved in support for their own local coastal sustainability transition. Those projects that only seek

to consult residents in a cursory way, can limit the ways in which citizens can become engaged. Yet there is often little public engagement with projects such as renewable energy development that lasts beyond planning application stages. Decisions are often made at strategic management levels, by investors, developers and planners in a top-down approach. A lack of genuine engagement can be a driver of the social unacceptability, if not the outright rejection and opposition to project development. Despite the obvious risks which a poorly executed stakeholder engagement strategy entails, academic and practice-based understandings of how to successfully engage individuals with coastal sustainability transitions remain underdeveloped.

Warren and McFadyen (2010) report that attitudes towards, and acceptance of, sustainability-related projects (particularly renewable energy projects) typically follow a U-shaped progression

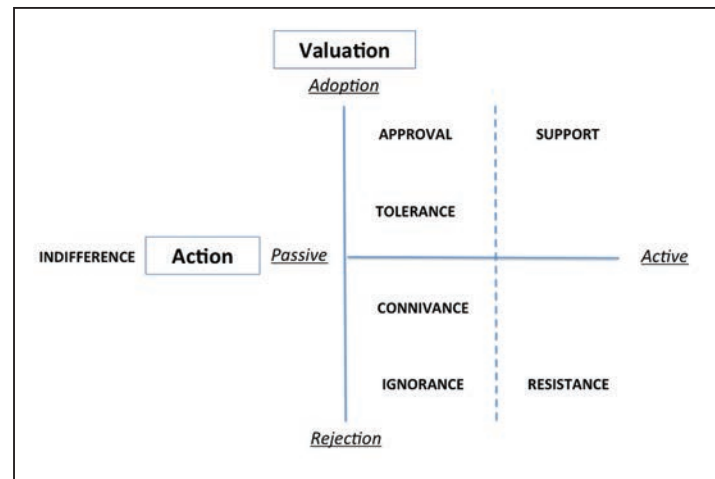
over time. Initially positive responses (when no schemes are planned) are replaced by negative responses (when a local project is proposed and development started). A return to positive attitudes is likely if local stakeholders gain positive experiences from the project in operation. Acceptance of, and resistance to sustainability projects may also be either active or passive, as illustrated in Figure 1. This Figure shows two important axes for the acceptance model: the valuation axis (positive–negative) and the action axis (active–passive).

The active dimension of engagement with sustainability related projects is an important distinguisher between acceptance and tolerance. Differences in governance approaches and public engagement practices influence the quantity, and quality, of citizen acceptability and participation, and can actively determine where on Figure 1 stakeholders will position themselves for a given project, whether in support or against, and whether in an active or passive manner.

Case Study: The Burbo Bank Project, Liverpool Bay, UK

The North West of England, particularly the Liverpool City Region, has in recent years established numerous renewable energy projects and support schemes that seek to transform energy generation in the area. The Burbo Bank Offshore Wind Farm is located 7km off-shore in Liverpool Bay in the Irish Sea. Developed in the 2000's, the 90 MW wind farm consists of 25 turbines. A large scale extension encompassing 32 new turbines is being developed by a joint venture between DONG Energy, PKA and KIRKBI A/S. The first turbine of the extension phase was installed in November 2016. Two main rounds of consultation were conducted in May–June 2011 and April 2012, following which DONG Energy produced the “Burbo Bank Extension Consultation Report March 2013”, detailing the consultation process, the feedback received as well as their responses to people's concerns. A further round of consultation was organised in 2014 and a Community Liaison Officer was appointed in 2015. According to DONG Energy, local

Figure 1: Model of acceptance subdivided into valuation and action



Source: after Schweizer-Ries, 2008

communities were engaged through the information provided on the project's website, a free information line, briefing packs, community newsletters, community access points, the community liaison officer, as well as press releases (DONG Energy, 2016). Local residents, local organisations, local businesses as well as local councillors and politicians were all involved in the process, consulted through the use of questionnaires and group discussion. Local newspapers, media and email were applied extensively in the consultation process.

A study of all British newspaper articles published between 2007–2017 on the Burbo Bank extension revealed the main points of debate on the project. In total, 112 articles were found on the matter. The majority of the newspaper articles mentioning or discussing the project were regional newspapers. Coverage typically highlighted broader issues on climate change; positive economic impacts; the consultation process; and

negative impacts arising from the development. Comments on climate change and renewable energy were mostly negative. Economic impacts of the project are mostly presented in positive terms. It seems to be widely accepted that DONG Energy is supporting economic growth, gives work to the UK supply chain, and creates local jobs. In addition, many references are made to the number of homes that will be powered thanks to the project. Typical

quotes include:

- “Offshore wind specialist DONG Energy is to build a new operations and maintenance centre in Wirral, creating 45 permanent jobs. [...] and up to 75 jobs are expected to be created in the construction phase of the project”. (Liverpool ECHO, 21.06.16)

Most negative impacts refer to the visual impact of the project and are presented in the Wirral Globe. Interestingly, the question of adverse noise impacts was only evoked once, by local residents in the Wirral area kept awake at night by a loud thudding “heartbeat” (to which DONG Energy responded by reviewing their schedule). Typical quotes include:

- “The horizon, which had already been disfigured beyond recognition by the first batch of turbines, is now all but obliterated by these latest additions which are absolutely massive and incredibly intrusive” (Local resident, Wirral Globe, 26.11.16).



Burbo Bank Wind Farm, Liverpool Bay, UK

Transitions in Practice

'Good' governance of coastal sustainability transitions focused on renewable energy initiatives should incorporate good practices in citizen engagement. Examples of these include citizens sitting on management boards and the active promotion and integration of new schemes within coastal communities to enhance all aspects of sustainable development. Public engagement is an integral component of coastal sustainability transitions, and one that cannot be overlooked. Therefore, how public engagement is managed has implications for coastal sustainability transitions. In the Burbo Bank project, during both rounds of consultation, participants were invited to agree/disagree with a certain number of statements related to climate change, wind power development, the consultation process itself and the Burbo Bank extension, and to indicate what they considered were the most significant issues with regard to the project under consideration. Participants' opinions overall do not show significant change over the two consultation rounds, except that more people in fact approved of the project during the second round of consultation. Their main concerns have barely changed, and include the visual impact of wind turbines as well as their

efficiency. The project is interesting for its broad ranging, step-wise and multi-modal stakeholder engagement process. Despite some critical discourse in local

media, the engagement process can be seen as largely succeeding, and as having successfully built support for the project over successive consultation rounds.

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STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN COASTAL SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS: AN EMERGING RESEARCH AGENDA

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Sustainability Transitions at the Coast and the role of stakeholder engagement

In this short paper we consider the issue of sustain-

able transitions in the coastal zone

with particular reference to renewable energy projects. While there has been considerable debate about sustainability transitions and the need for stakeholder engagement within such projects, much research to date has neglected coastal areas. This is surprising given that the coastal zone is particularly susceptible to the impacts of climate change, and much policy attention towards establishing new renewable energy projects is focussed on coastal areas. While the development of renewable energy projects in coastal areas have numerous advantages for supporting a sustainable transition, such projects need to engage numerous stakeholders and users to increase their acceptability and legitimacy. In the UK, there are around 6.2

million people (equating to 11% of the population) living at the coast (Office for National Statistics, 2014). Furthermore, tourists who visit these areas are a significant part of the economy of coastal areas: in 2016, there were over 21 million staying visitors to the coast, and a further 106 million domestic day visits (National Coastal Tourism Academy, 2016). These diverse communities and users all represent stakeholders who are potentially impacted by sustainable energy projects. Therefore, the views and attitudes of these users need to be taken into account when developing renewable energy projects at the coast. To achieve this, meaningfully engaging the public with projects in multiple ways is required. This is essential to address