

BESTGRID process on public acceptance: going beyond existing practices of stakeholders involvement for electricity transmission projects

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Introduction

Goals of climate change mitigation and energy security policies are key drivers for the EU energy transition towards low carbon energy generation. Even though alternative technologies, including renewable energy, are well advanced, the current state of electricity grids is one of the bottlenecks for their further deployment. Inhabitants of communities affected by planned infrastructure are protesting against further projects to deploy electricity grids in many European countries. The innovative BESTGRID process brings together organized stakeholders from civil society, academia and the energy sector to understand the nature of concerns about these projects and to test various actions to address the concerns to gain public acceptance. The BESTGRID approach is the first project constructed around the active cooperation between NGOs and TSOs.

Methods and research questions

- What are stakeholders concerns about deployment of electricity transmission grids in Europe?
- What are successful actions to address these concerns?
- Which level of participation can be achieved in electricity transmission infrastructure siting?

We focus on five real-world pilot projects, which are currently in planning or construction: SuedLink and Bertikow-Pasewalk connections in Germany, NEMO link in UK, Stevin and Braine l'Alleud connection in Belgium. We collect empirical data through extensive dialogue with stakeholders, by observation of public and stakeholders information events, by conducting interviews with key stakeholders, and an on-site survey in all communities where public information events for SuedLink, the biggest planned project, were organized.

References

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- Komendantova, N., Linnerooth-Bayer, J., (2015). Public protests against deployment of electricity transmission infrastructure in Europe: what are successful actions to deal with issues of public acceptance? Evaluation of best practices application, with revisions to protocol and action plans. Deliverable 2.4. BestGrid Project, Brussels, 2015

Results

Mapping of Transmission Systems Operators (TSOs) actions on the ladder of Arnstein showed that most of these actions reach the middle level of participation such as therapy (media campaigns on risk perceptions, stakeholders mapping), information (public and stakeholders information events), consultation and placation (workshops and round table discussions). These are typical levels for participation in infrastructure projects in Europe. Cooperation with national and local NGOs on action plans and their implementation resulted in a higher level of partnership.

Our results showed that concerns about the need of the projects, issues of visibility and impacts on human health as well as transparency of information about planning procedures and decision-making processes are more relevant than concerns about compensations or benefits from the projects.

Conclusions

BESTGRID showed that the methods of stakeholders dialogue which allow for direct communication between different groups of stakeholders or inhabitants of affected communities and TSOs were perceived much more positive than only distribution of printed information about the projects. By speaking about the changing nature of concerns, new concerns might appear with the increased level of information and awareness, therefore establishment of a permanent focal point at the local governance to address these concerns and for dialogue with stakeholders is recommendable. Certain groups of stakeholders, such as young people, might be critical to the projects but are not actively searching for information and possibilities to provide feedback. Therefore, new methods of stakeholders dialogue are required to target these groups of stakeholders. Also additional research is needed to understand the drivers and factors influencing concerns of particular stakeholders groups.

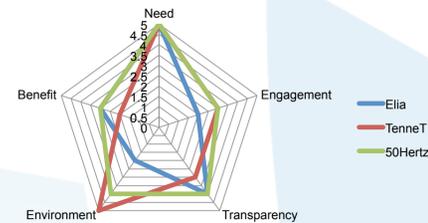


Figure 1: content analysis showed that concerns about the need of the project were mentioned most frequently (235 times), followed by environment (149) and transparency (125)

