



National University of Ireland, Galway  
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh



# *Social Sustainability and Wind Energy Development: Experiences from the Field*

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Supported by EPA

September 29<sup>th</sup> 2010

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## Key issues



- National steering
- Local authority engagement
- Structural change
- Ownership and power
- Economic returns
- Participation in planning
- 'Best' practice?



Photos: Author

# Ireland's wind industry

- Predominantly corporate ownership
- Nearly 700MW (of ~1400MW) owned by three corporate interests alone
- Diverse opinions regarding local engagement

Minority undertake little or no consultations with local communities.

Minority strongly identify with the Ideology of community participation.

Majority view consultations as:

Good planning practice  
Means of mitigating local opposition and enhancing chance of planning success

Most common methods:  
Public exhibitions

Wariness of public meetings

- Engagement practices are informed by:
  - (a) previous experiences
  - (b) their ideological commitment to best practice
  - (c) their assessment of:
    - local opposition and of the necessity to get local people on-side
    - local capacity and interest of citizens to engage in consultation mechanisms
    - the legitimacy of local knowledge and concerns
  - (d) size and location of the project

# Industry trends

- Industry up-scaling
- Repowering
- Beyond local community capacity in many cases
- Corporate players
- Alienation from grassroots
- Remedial interventions
  - New methods of local involvement in planning
  - New monetary compensation mechanisms



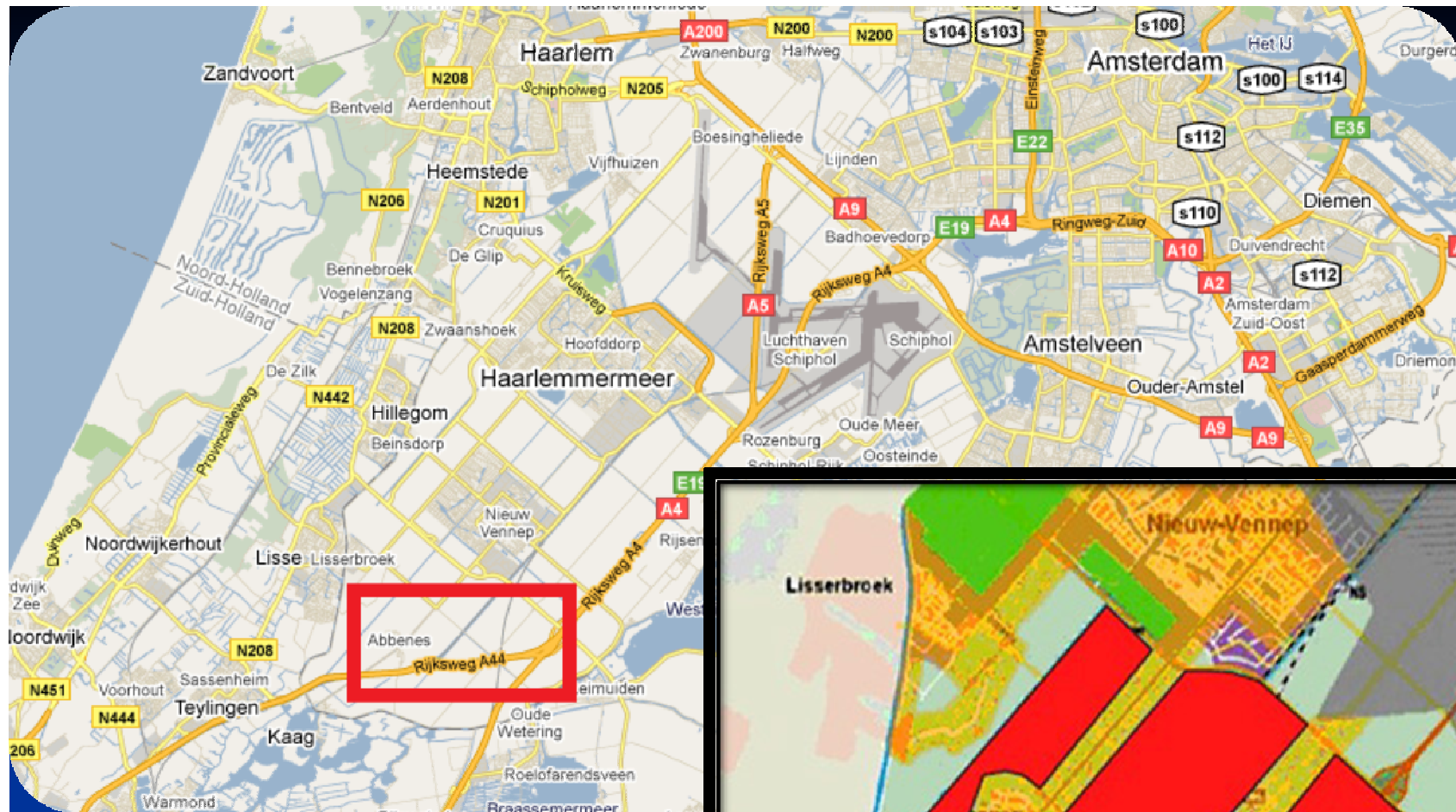
“It ain’t what you do it’s the way that you do it”

- Collaborative planning
  - Wind Park Haarlemmermeer Zuid  
Province of Noord Holland  
The Netherlands
- Economic returns
  - Issues with monetary compensation
  - Danish Promotion of Renewable  
Energy Act 2009



# Wind Park Haarlemmermeer Zuid

- Municipality initiated (2006)
- 20MW project
- Prospective investors to be decided
- Collaborative approach
- Still at design phase
- National government support withdrawn



[www.maps.google.com](http://www.maps.google.com)

# Wind Park Haarlemmermeer Zuid

## Proposed 20MW project



potentiële moelijkheden windturbines binnen zoek gebied (lichtrood)

[http://www.haarlemmermeer.nl/Wonen\\_en\\_leven/Woonomgeving\\_en\\_milieu/Energie/Windenergie](http://www.haarlemmermeer.nl/Wonen_en_leven/Woonomgeving_en_milieu/Energie/Windenergie)



- Process guidelines

*...communication is the key word of the whole project*  
(municipal planner)

- Communication objectives:

- creating supportive attitudes to wind energy development in Haarlemmermeer
- increasing local knowledge regarding wind energy
- encouraging residents to participate in the project.
- Conflict solved primarily through discussion and weighing options

- Establishment of a cooperative of local landowners to work in a collaborative manner to create three alternative viable project designs
  
- Project is operationalised through:
  - Municipal project group
  - Initiative group
  - Kern group (lead group)
  - Facilitator
  
  - Stichting (Foundation)
  - Design team

# Advantages (IG perspective)

- Increased local acceptance of wind energy
- Meaningful influence on the process
- Process is transparent and fair
- Local citizens have a vested interest
- Realisation of renewable energy
- Bonds and ties are created

# Difficulties

- Defining stakeholder roles
- Stakeholder interest and willingness to participate in a consistent manner
- Fractured Initiative Group
- Mistrust of municipality
  - *There is a secret plan in a drawer somewhere*
- Timeliness of municipality in providing supports
- Revisiting decisions – going around in circles
- Time consuming – still at planning phase

# Recommendations

- Leadership for consensus building to work
- Municipal support - proactive
- Skilful facilitation by trusted individual
- Clear guidelines - stakeholders must have a clear understanding of their roles and expected input
- Transparency – no ‘secret’ meetings
- Avoid complicated structures
- All stakeholders need to feel influential with equal opportunity for voice to be heard

# Economic returns

- Goal – reduce opposition, improve the chances of planning success
- Factors of influence identified:
  - (a) project promoters want to retain as much profit as possible
  - (b) project promoters display significant wariness that local people will perceive economic returns as bribes to get them on side
  - (c) project promoters seek guidance regarding operationalising such schemes

# Citizens' perspectives

- (a) local citizens may not have the capacity or desire to invest in a wind energy project
- (b) local people perceive economic returns accruing to only one or two stakeholders as unfair
- (d) local people feel ostracised when they are not engaged in the process in a manner in which they *feel they can get anything out of it*

# Legislating for local involvement

- Promotion of Renewable Energy Act 2009 (Denmark)
- To ensure that local involvement in wind energy *is not a thing of the past* (Danish interviewee)

Four key provisions:

- (a) Compensation scheme for loss of value to property
- (b) Local citizens' option to purchase shares
- (c) Green fund scheme to enhance local scenic and recreational values
- (d) Guarantee fund to support preliminary investigations by local wind turbine owners' associations



# Recommendations

- Meaningful engagement with impacted communities
  - It is important *for citizens to really participate* in planning and decision-making and to learn *how to do good planning that involves people* (Dutch and Danish interviewees)
  - Investment opportunities
  - Community funds
  
- Enhanced role of planning authorities
  - Proactive involvement in site selection and local consultations
  - Financial supports for community collaboration



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# Acknowledgements



- EPA STRIVE Programme for funding
- Prof. Micheál Ó Cinnéide
- Dr. Henrike Rau
- Prof. Ulf Strohmayer



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Environmental Protection Agency



Thank you for your kind attention.

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