

When “made in Europe” is more important than money: Investigating the role of community benefit schemes on community acceptance of wind energy in Switzerland

Martina Schwizer

University of St.Gallen - RISE, St.Gallen, Switzerland

Extended Abstract

[Download file](#)

Abstract Summary

This study investigates factors shaping community acceptance of wind energy projects on a local level in Switzerland, a country that remains far behind most European states in terms of wind energy deployment. Even though distributive justice mechanisms are often seen as important drivers of social acceptance, empirical research findings remain mixed. In addition, most papers rely on national samples, not capturing the specificities needed to understand the local level. To address this gap, a representative local survey (N=322) in Eastern Switzerland was conducted using a discrete choice experiment to assess how different wind project characteristics, including community benefit schemes, influence acceptance of a hypothetical wind park on the outskirts of the city of St.Gallen. In addition to widely used attributes in social acceptance literature (i.e., number of wind turbines, ownership structure), newly examined attributes were also included (i.e., origin of wind turbine manufacturer, material of turbine tower). Results indicate high general acceptance for the hypothetical wind project, with 75.4% voting (rather) in favour. CBC analysis shows that the origin of the wind turbine manufacturer is the most important attribute: turbines from a Danish manufacturer made the project significantly more popular than wind turbines from a U.S. or Chinese manufacturer. Tower material ranks second, with steel and wood towers perceived favourably and concrete unfavourably. Locally diversified ownership structures ranked third. The wind resource tax, as the operationalized community benefit scheme enhance acceptance levels, although its importance remains comparatively small. These findings suggest that community benefit schemes can strengthen community acceptance of future wind energy projects, but do not need to be seen as the only elixir to shape community acceptance. Policymakers should consider recommending guidelines for wind parks “made in Europe”, but also that visually and environmentally appealing materials for the wind turbine tower should not be neglected.

Presenting Author Biography

Martina Schwizer is a research associate and doctoral candidate at the Institute for Responsible Innovation, Sustainability and Energy at the University of St.Gallen. Martina Schwizer's dissertation focuses on the dynamics of social acceptance of wind energy projects in Switzerland. She co-leads the PARTI-DYNACCEPT project, which is funded by the Swiss Federal Office of Energy and the Canton of St.Gallen. Her research focuses on the influence of financial participation mechanisms on the dynamics of social acceptance. More specifically, she seeks to examine how emotions, geographic boundaries, and time shape the relationship between financial participation mechanisms and community acceptance of wind power.