Facts, Hacks and Turbines: Media Analysis of Irish Wind Energy

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Wind Energy in Ireland

Source: SEAI: (2015)

Source: UK Sustainable Development Commission, 2005
Social Acceptance challenges for wind energy

- Community acceptance generally seen to be driven by:
  - Perceived health and environmental impacts;
  - Fairness of decision-making process
  - Perceived distribution of costs and benefits
- Social representation of these issues and their interpretation in specific social contexts.
The social framing of wind energy

- The attitude-behaviour gap and framing of NIMBY ‘deviancy’.
- Issues of scale, place, process, actor involvement all influence the discourse and meaning of ‘wind energy’.
- The multiple representations of wind energy and its shaping of the public’s response to place-specific developments.
- The dynamic of social representations and discourses as wind developments increase, change in scale and occupy new spaces.
The media and public perception

- The media play a key role in (re)producing, validating and transforming dominant discourses, meanings and truth claims.
- The media’s place in the social-technological system of energy.
- Media portrayal influenced by journalistic norms, perceptions of news worthiness, broader political economy of the media etc...
- Media received and interpreted in terms of existing worldviews, immediate concerns etc ...
- Increasing complexity of media and role of the print outlets.
Methodological approach [1]

- Sample of three key newspapers 2000-2015:
  - Irish Times (circulation 93k)
  - Irish Independent (circulation 126k)
  - Irish Examiner (circulation 40k)

- Sampling:
  - 12 search terms using Nexis UK (wind energy, wind power etc) = 19894 articles
  - Cleaning, relevancy and removal of duplications = 8224 articles
Methodological approach [2]

- Descriptive statistics
- Content analysis using 35 key terms on sample (1 in 6 articles):
  - Historical diachronic (time)
  - Comparative synchronic (difference between papers)
- Qualitative content analysis of 200 articles (1 in 35) from 2007-2015, using Atlas.ti
- Coding of 282 articles taken from peak media activity (Nov 2007-Jan 2008)
ALL PAPERS: Total stories by month, January 2000-June 2015

Irish Independent goes online
Irish Examiner goes online
Irish Times
### Content analysis results for three Irish newspapers (2006-2015, 1 in 6 sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>NO. OF MENTIONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landowner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
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<td>Benefit</td>
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<td>Health</td>
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<td>Property</td>
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<td>NIMBY</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
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<td>Public</td>
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<td>UK</td>
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<td>Protest</td>
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<td>Opposition</td>
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<td>Europe</td>
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<td>Environment</td>
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<td>Climate</td>
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<td>Vibration</td>
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<td>Noise</td>
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<td>Landscape</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
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<td>Community</td>
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<td>Stakeholders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social</td>
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<td>Developers</td>
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<td>Safety</td>
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<td>Radar</td>
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<td>Bird strike</td>
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<td>House prices</td>
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<td>Low frequency</td>
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<td>Environmental groups</td>
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<td>Community benefit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Property values</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Climate change</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The chart shows the frequency of mentions for various topics in Irish newspapers over the specified period. The topics are categorized into themes such as landowner, farmer, health, property, and community benefit, among others.
Coding results of selected items from 3 Irish newspapers
(2007 – 2015, 1 in 6 sample) % of articles mentioning items

- Community
- Economy
- Climate
- Environment
Coding results of selected items from 3 Irish newspapers
(2007 – 2015, 1 in 6 sample)
Overall Discourse: positive, negative or neutral
(2007-2015 sample)
Peaks in coverage

Peak years: Total stories in 2008 and 2014

- Irish Examiner
- Irish Independent
- The Irish Times

Peak year (2008): Total number of stories by month
- The Irish Times
- Irish Independent
- Irish Examiner

Peak year (2014): Total number of stories by month
- The Irish Times
- Irish Independent
- Irish Examiner
Overall discourse: positive, negative or neutral
(n.200, Nov 2007 - Jan 2008)
Dominant framings
(n.200, Nov 2007 - Jan 2008)
Scale of concern: local, national, global
(n.200, Nov 2007 - Jan 2008)
Issues of voice
(n.200, Nov 2007 - Jan 2008)

- Citizens/Public
- Energy companies
- Environmental/Lobby groups
- Local communities
- Government/Political
Conclusions

- Broad consensus amongst three key newspapers, but emphasise different issues;
- An inevitable dynamic nature of issues and coverage, key issues being:
  - Gradual increase of positive stories
  - Developer interests appear to dominate
  - Economic and national interests more commonly presented
  - Voices of protest register when influencing these dominant values
- No clear link between press coverage and ‘acceptance’, but can be seen in context of the transition of the Irish energy system.