

Planning and community acceptance for renewable energy projects

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Outline

- ❑ Community acceptance as a core strategy for the delivery of renewables.
- ❑ Drivers of community opposition;
- ❑ Impacts of a lack of acceptance on long term generating capacity;
- ❑ Models of developing community acceptance;
- ❑ Areas of innovation



Community acceptance as a core strategy for the renewables industry

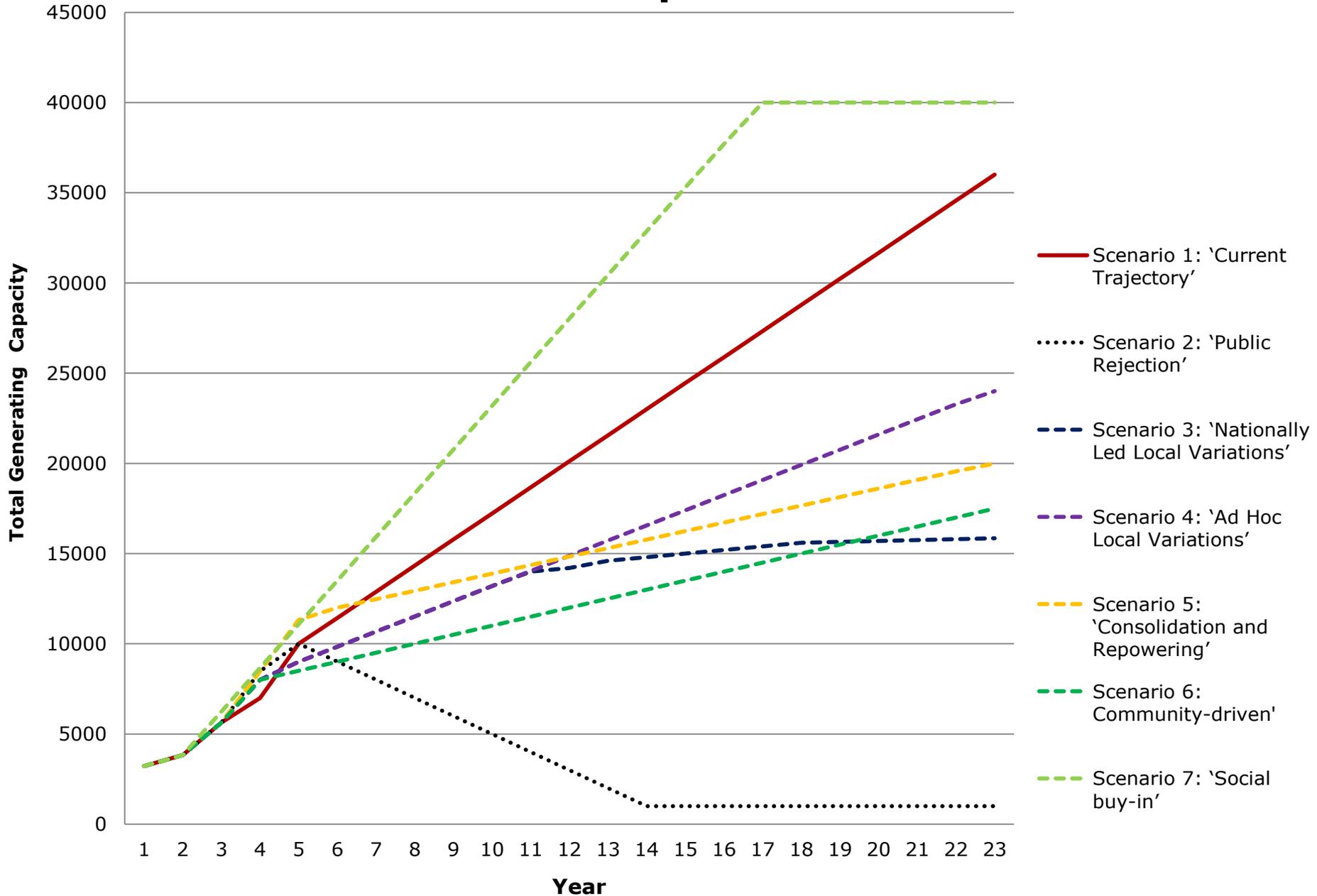
- Wind/solar/bioenergy conventionally seen as 'infrastructure' - and conditional on planning, finance and other supporting infrastructure.
 - Energy as a social-technical system
 - What limits the ultimate level of deployment of renewables such as on shore wind;
 - Technology?
 - Grid?
 - Wind resource?
 - Social Acceptance?
 - The long term need to increase community acceptance
 - Realistic aspirations: 'acceptance'; 'support'; 'objection'
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Social acceptance scenarios?

- **Scenario 1: Current Trajectory**
 - Ad hoc improvements in engagement, varied practice, local pockets of opposition.
 - **Scenario 2: 'Public rejection'**
 - Poor projects or major incident turn wind toxic, resulting in widespread collapse of social acceptance.
 - **Scenario 3/4: 'Local variation' (nationally/locally-led)**
 - Practice varies according to practice of municipalities, some areas welcome wind energy, while, some reject it.
 - **Scenario 5: 'Consolidation and re-powering'**
 - Wind energy becomes isolated to redeveloping existing schemes.
 - **Scenario 6: 'Community-driven'**
 - Widespread support for community schemes, backlash to larger, externally owned schemes
 - **Scenario 7: 'Social buy-in'**
 - Universal support, competing for attracting new schemes
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Hypothetical trajectory of wind energy capacity under social acceptance scenarios

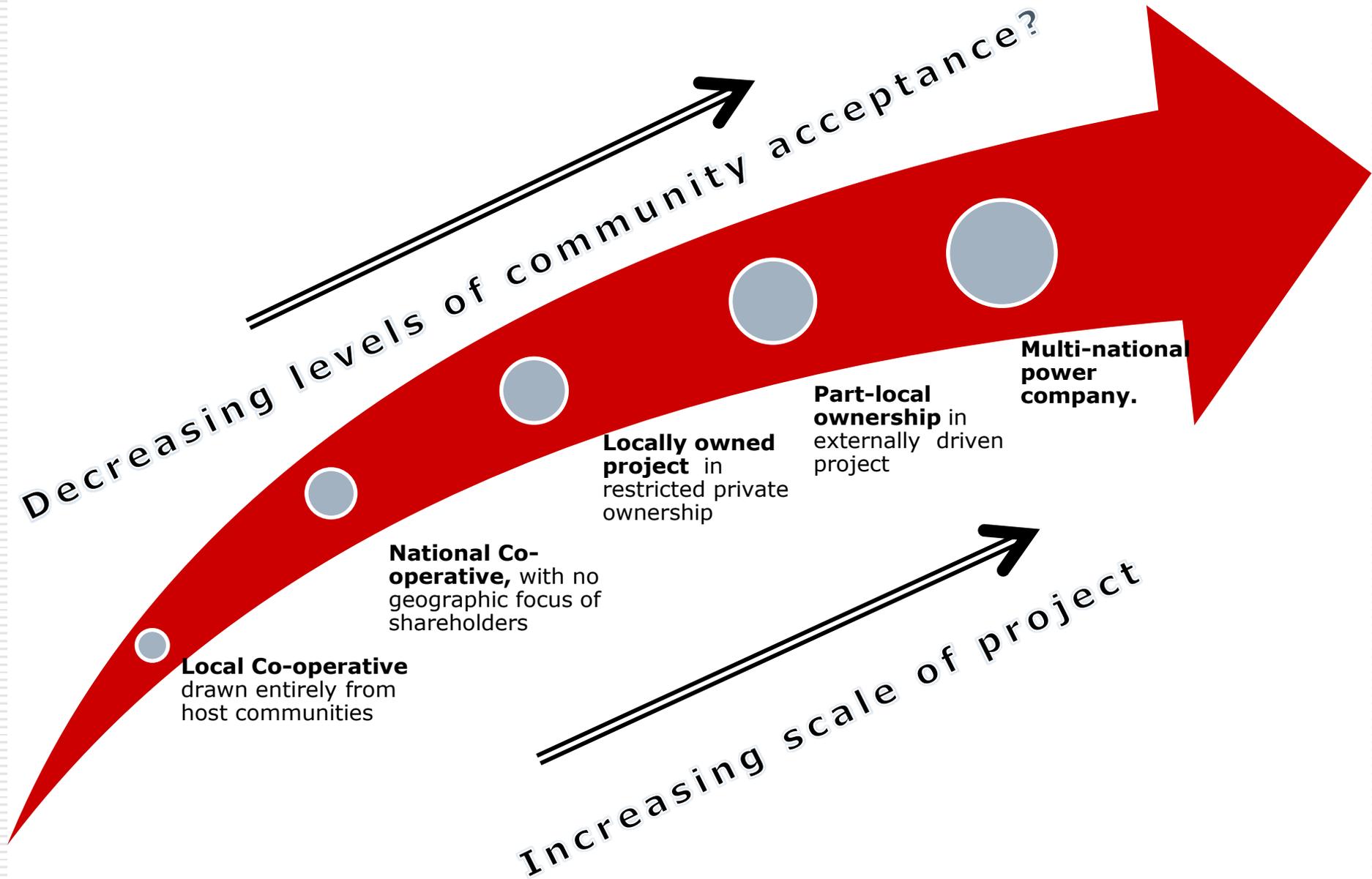


What (generally) drives opposition to wind energy projects?

- **Health and environmental impacts;**
 - Concerns over visual, bio-diversity, well-being impacts on local area etc;
 - *Potential Responses:* improved project design and locational policies and impact assessment.
 - **Fairness of decision-making process;**
 - Lack of trust in developers, regulators and the transparency of the consenting regime;
 - *Potential Responses:* increased participation, the role of intermediaries.
 - **Perceived distribution of costs and benefits;**
 - Fear that external companies accrue key benefits, while local communities bear main costs;
 - *Potential Responses:* procurement policies, increased community benefits and ownership.
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Scale-acceptance trade offs?



Community acceptance is enhanced through:

- Good project design that avoids unacceptable impacts Health and environmental impacts;
 - A recognition that there are always some impacts, which needs to be mitigated or compensated for;
 - High levels of trust between communities, regulators and developers;
 - A transparent decision-making process with adequate opportunities for voice, in which all are respected;
 - A distribution of costs and benefits that is perceived to be fair and proportionate;
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Models of developing community acceptance



Corporate Responses

- ❑ This driver of good practice relies on the wind energy industry to voluntarily provide benefits in recognition that it is in their interest.
- ❑ This may be an expression of corporate responsibility, company outlook or a way of seeking competitive advantage.
- ❑ Practice is highly variable and community acceptance appears to be strongly influenced by examples of poor practice.

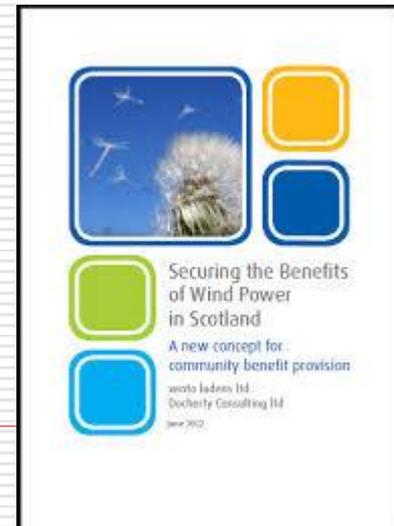


Examples of Corporate initiatives

- ❑ Environmental enhancement (e.g. visitor centres, bike trials),
 - ❑ Industry-wide protocols; e.g. IWEA Best Practice
 - ❑ Community benefit funds by MW, lump sum or revenue;
 - ❑ Benefits in Kind (education funds, energy efficiency)
 - ❑ Discounted electricity schemes (RES);
 - ❑ Local or national share options;
 - ❑ Local procurement and employment;
 - ❑ Objection avoidance through site selection;
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Regulator-driven strategies

- Regulators can use their authority to promote community acceptance through:
 - Linking renewables with energy security, climate change;
 - Land Use Zoning Policy (Wales, County Development Plans);
 - Planning standards for siting and mitigation of impacts such as set back distance, noise (DECLG revised guidelines)
 - Planning gain and developer contribution schemes (Co. Mayo)
 - Danish Promotion of Renewable Energy Act 2008
 - Community Benefit Register (Scotland)
 - Community Energy targets (Scotland)



Community driven outcomes

- ❑ Communities can be sources of resistance and objection, with less research on drivers of support.
- ❑ Communities can be active promoters of wind energy through:
 - Local advocacy and links to sustainability strategies (e.g. Transition Towns, LA21).
 - Agricultural diversification opportunities
 - Local Community ownership through a variety of models.
- ❑ This is likely to have significant leverage over acceptance levels.



The need for fresh thinking for community acceptance

- ❑ Current approaches not universally successful and acceptance issues appear to be increasing;
- ❑ Need to be clear about what works and what does not work in what context and why;
- ❑ Is a focus on Community Benefits justified?
- ❑ The promotion of energy as a social concept;
- ❑ A need for more innovative approaches, with an emphasis on community and regulator strategies.



Potential areas of innovation

- Corporate responses:
 - Driving innovation through competition for sites: Community wind auctions.
 - Greater self regulation or accreditation?
- Regulator responses:
 - Compulsory local share offers;
 - Community benefit register;
 - Nationalisation of wind?
- Community responses:
 - Local and national community energy strategies
 - Promotion of Co-operatives and community asset transfers
 - Increased use of intermediary bodies



Final reflections

- ❑ Renewables are a business to developers, fulfilment of targets to government but more should be seen broadly as a social project;
 - ❑ We must be realistic about the level of 'acceptance' that can be achieved, but wary of its impact if it is not enhanced;
 - ❑ There is no silver bullet and current approaches limited in success;
 - ❑ There is an onus on developers to improve practice, but there is also a need for a more collective response;
 - ❑ The needs for further innovation, experimentation and the dissemination of good practice.
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