



ECN

Your energy. Our passion.

Social Site Characterisation

Prevention is better than cure

Energy is getting closer to people's lives. The transition to a sustainable energy system requires more frequent interventions in the living environment of citizens than before. Moreover, citizens nowadays are more articulate and increasingly well-informed.

Projects are increasingly facing public resistance. This leads to delays, reputation damage and in some cases even cancellation of the project. Having good knowledge of the project environment in advance is essential for a more professional dialogue with local stakeholders, and leads to increased satisfaction among all involved parties.

Resistance can be traced back to process management

Research conducted by ECN and partner organisations shows that conflicts are often deeply rooted in the project approach itself. Traditionally, this approach is strongly project-oriented, focusing on 'hard' (technical, economic) project criteria, whereas what is actually needed is having a say in the detailing of the project. Stakeholders feel they have only limited opportunity to thoroughly examine the procedure, limited room to exert influence and little time to develop a well-informed opinion. As a consequence, residents and local stakeholders may feel that the deal is already done when they come to the table and hence make an all-out effort to frustrate and delay the process. This leads to unforeseen costs and sometimes even cancellation of projects.

Larger chance of success through better project management

Enhanced process management yields benefits for the short and long term. In the short term, enhanced process management improves the chances of success of a project itself and curbs the (financial) risk of delay or cancellation of a project. In the long term, it improves the reputation of the project developer and of the technological solution that is implemented.

Reliable information for a better process

Through years of research, ECN has obtained much insight in the causes and effects of social resistance, and more importantly how this can be prevented. It has become evident that an effective process is tailored to the project and starts with a reliable image of the local situation.

ECN offers this type of tailored support. Depending on the situation, ECN engages in desk research, interviews, focus groups, media analyses and/or representative surveys to identify the relevant stakeholders, their interest in the project, their perceptions of the project and how these are shaped.

Using the information obtained from the exploratory study is the next step in shaping the participation process. This involves addressing aspects such as communication with residents, making plans that match the needs of local stakeholders, and dealing with conflicting interests.

Examples of public resistance

- *Overhead power lines, Norway.* Plans to install overhead power lines in one of the scenic touristic areas of Norway resulted in protests from local communities and the formation of four expert panels, and saw the Norwegian coalition government suffer in opinion polls once involved in the national discussion.
- *37-mile 400kv connector transmission-line, UK.* At Hinkley Point a local protest organisation 'Save Our Valley' (SOV) ran its own public engagement campaign distributing leaflets, organising meetings, and writing to local politicians and the national government.
- *CO₂ storage in Barendrecht, the Netherlands.* Public opposition to plans for CO₂ storage under the town of Barendrecht led to cancellation of the plans, followed by a decision by the Dutch government to abandon onshore CO₂ storage altogether for the time being.

Division of roles

The project developer implements this process himself, if needed supported by a process facilitator. ECN supports the project group as an independent party that

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supplies reliable information on the project environment. Moreover, ECN can act as sparring partner during process implementation.

Two keys to success

Correct timing and involvement in social site characterization in the project team are essential for an effective process.

As far as timing is concerned, the sooner the better, possibly even when the final choice of location not yet made. This stage still offers room for stakeholders to influence the project implementation. Once all choices have been made and conflicts with stakeholders have risen, mediation may be the only solution left.

The right level of involvement of the developer is also important. Social site characterisation is tailored work and at the service of project development. The research is not a goal in itself. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the approach is supported by the entire project team.

ECN's additional value

The knowledge and capabilities of ECN have a scientific basis, offering the following benefits:

- *Independent party*
ECN is not a stakeholder in the project, but an independent source of information and a sparring partner ('fly on the wall').
- *Facilitating the participation process*
The project developer has control of the public participation. We provide information for designing the process and test this against the best available knowledge of what is effective and what is ineffective. Consequently, the process becomes more effective without additional effort from the developer.

- *Translating practical problems into strategic questions*
Next to an extensive knowledge base, ECN has in-depth knowledge of and experience with institutional and social forces in project collaboration and possible sources of conflict.
- *Reliable, quantitative data.*
Robust data are essential for developing effective strategy. ECN deploys scientifically sound methods and analyses to develop a reliable 'social map' of local conditions without mobilising opposition to the project plans among all parties involved.
- *Experience with large, complex project environments*
ECN has extensive knowledge of decision-making processes regarding controversial topics such as nuclear energy and CO₂ capture and storage.

Using the ECN approach in practice

- *SiteChar.* Together with partners, ECN is conducting social site characterisation for CO₂ storage locations in Poland and Scotland. The goal is to identify possible causes of local resistance before they arise and to enter into dialogue about them. For more information, please visit www.sitechar-co2.eu.
- *ESTEEM.* Method partly developed by ECN to map the support for sustainable energy projects. More examples and further information can be found on www.esteem-tool.eu.
- *NEARCO2.* Developing participation strategies based on an international comparison of various case studies, including CO₂ storage in Barendrecht and onshore wind in Zijpe in the Netherlands. For more information, please visit www.communicationnearco2.eu.