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Further Reading: Brennan, N. and van Rensburg, T. (2016). Wind farm externalities and public preferences for community consultation in Ireland: A discrete choice experiments approach. *Energy Policy*, 2016, vol. 94, issue C, pages 355-365.

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Public acceptance of large scale wind energy generation for export from Ireland to the UK: Evidence from Ireland

Due to its location, the Republic of Ireland experiences comparatively high wind regimes. Energy policies in the EU have encouraged the statistical trading of energy; specifically Directive 2009/28/EC, which allows for the importation of renewable energy to count towards renewable energy targets. In January 2013 a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the UK and Ireland initiating plans for 3 large wind farm developments in the midlands of Ireland which aimed to export all electricity produced to the UK. The project was strongly opposed by local residents and did not proceed as planned. Public scepticism internationally over large scale development of renewable energy resources specifically for exportation (REE) represents a major obstacle to the industry; however, the reasons underlying community opposition are not always clear. If policymakers wish to take advantage of Ireland's comparative advantage in wind energy through exports, identifying these community acceptance barriers to large scale development is crucial.

Research Findings

This research incorporated results from three community and two developer focus groups as well as survey responses from 200 members of the public. The survey results found that 59% of respondents were opposed to wind farm construction for export. The community focus group respondents elaborated on this, indicating that the absence of local benefits and non-biased project information as well as the perceived lack of fairness in the process bolstered this opinion. Community participants proposed that local employment, financial benefits and state ownership would increase their acceptance of export projects. Community respondents were not satisfied with the amount of information and consultation provided by developers and there was a general mistrust around the motivations of developers. The majority of the developers, on the other hand, were in favour of export projects; however they did concede that a lack of information and exaggerated local benefits hindered the Midlands windfarm proposal of 2013. While developers were keen to extol the virtues of wind farm benefits, local residents had anxiety over negative externalities, mainly comprising health and quality of life concerns. This research also found that both residents and developers were supportive of co-management schemes. However, local residents expressed concerns over the practicalities of such an endeavour.

Policy Implications

Our findings indicate that large scale deployment of wind farms in Ireland specifically to export electricity to the UK, may be premature. Survey data and group deliberation by local residents indicate a strong preference for state or semi-state led initiatives over private developers. Current policy does not favour one group over another specifically, but does make community ownership difficult through a lack of support. Policy makers concerned with the export sector need to reflect on better information provision, community consultation, trust building, effective instruments to internalise wind farm externalities and co-management arrangements before Ireland can fully capture the benefits of wind exports.