APPROACHES TO PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL ENERGY-PLANNING

Examples from a Swedish region

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Abstract

This paper presents a study in which ten small local authorities were asked how they would like to approach local stakeholders in their energy-planning. Based on the answers this paper discusses participation in an energy-planning context and shows how goals and methods may differ according to the different target groups the local authorities wish to reach. The different approaches to stakeholder participation are then categorised into four categories – participation as capacity building, participation as a way to create acceptance, participation as a way to change behaviour and participation as partnership building – and discussed in relation to participation literature.

Keywords

Energy-planning, participation, local authorities.

1. Introduction

The local level is important when it comes to developing sustainable energy systems. This means that local authorities[1] need to take a leading role in the transition of energy systems towards renewable energy resources and energy efficiency. To support local authorities in

[1] In this paper we have used two words for local administrations: local authority and municipality. Local authority refers to the administrative body at the local level. Municipality refers to the whole municipal organisation, including the political government.

these issues there are a number of initiatives to provide networks, information sharing and knowledge transfer. For example, in the EU a large number of cities and communities participate in initiatives such as ManagEnergy programme (European Commission Directorate-General for Energy and Transport 2008) and the Covenant of Mayors (European Commission 2010). In Sweden there are several programmes supporting local authorities in their work with energy and climate related issues, for example Sustainable Municipalities initialised by the Swedish Energy Agency and the Climate Municipalities funded by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency.

One important component in all of these programmes is the formulation of local energy and/or climate strategies or plans. Such strategic documents are used to clarify, prioritise and suggest measures connected to the local authority's fields of responsibility and activity within the energy system. There is also a legal requirement in Sweden that all municipalities should adopt a municipal energy-plan (SFS 1977:439 1977).

The potential of local energy strategies have been highlighted in a number of studies (Jaccard et al. 1997; Butera 1998; Anderson and Doig 2000; Jank 2000). Historically there have however been debates about the effectiveness of producing such documents, for example because many of the factors influencing the energy system lies beyond the reach of local authorities (Guy and Marvin 1996; Olerup 2000; Olerup 2002; Palm 2004). Despite this critique, the current development suggests that the importance of local authorities in the transition towards sustainable energy systems will not decrease. In many cases, local authorities are considered to be one of the leading actors in the local adaption and implementation of ambitious energy objectives stated on the national and international level. Local authorities will therefore need to prepare for future challenges regarding strategic energy issues. Capacity building will be necessary and one important field is the increasing demand for collaboration and networking with other actors within the local community. One way to initialise such capacity building is to increase stakeholder participation in local energy-planning.

When it comes to Sweden, there is little practical experience from stakeholder participation in energy-planning. This paper presents a study in which ten small local authorities were asked how they would like to approach local stakeholders in their energy-planning. All local authorities are part of a regional two-year project aimed to give them support in their energy-planning processes. Based on the answers this paper discusses participation in an energy-

planning context and shows how goals and methods may differ according to the different target groups the local authorities wish to reach.

2. Stakeholder participation and local energy strategies

In Sweden, citizens have quite extensive legal rights to participate, both in land-use planning and in the handling of the environmental application for projects (SFS 1987:10 1987; SFS 1998:808 1998). Within the energy-planning legislation, there are no legal requirements to involve stakeholders, but stakeholder participation is often recommended by national and regional authorities. Energy strategy related handbooks (California Energy Commission, 1997; Jank, 2000; Joanneum Research, 2000; Rydén, 2001; Swedish Energy Agency, 2001), as well as energy-planning literature (Jank 2000; Ling et al. 2002; Rydén 2006) also emphasise the importance of cooperation between different stakeholders in energy-planning processes.

The reasons given for increased stakeholder participation are manifold: the possibility to identify wider public concerns, the need to share information and develop expertise knowledge and the furthering of legitimacy (Dryzek 1990; Benhabib 1996; Gutmann and Thomson 2004). Participatory planning is also considered to improve planning in terms of acceptance and ability to generate public support, at the same time as it promotes social justice and environmental sustainability (Healey 1993).

However, participation in municipal planning has long been a challenge (Khakee 1999). There are many forms of participation (Gilljam et al. 2003). The most common forms are in the form of remittance procedures and exhibitions (Khan 2003b). This approach to participation has been criticised for leading to a knowledge-gap between the planners and the public since they are positioned at the very end of the process and the public is faced with a predetermined proposal and with little or no insight into alternative decision options within the planning process (Golobic and Marusic, 2007).

As mentioned in the introduction, there is little knowledge and practice of stakeholder participation in energy-planning in Sweden. Some pilot projects have been made, for example an energy-planning process involving a Citizen's Panel described in (Ivner 2009a; Ivner 2009b; Ivner et al. 2010). More attention has been paid to stakeholder involvement at the project level, for example wind power establishment (Khan 2003b) and renewable energy-plants (Ling et al. 2002; Khan 2004). One of the conclusions made by Khan (2003a) is that it is an advantage if plants and projects are seen as parts of a larger whole rather than

a separate occasion. He also points out that if stakeholders are involved at the project level only, there is a risk that people are more intended to obstruct plans, not to promote a general strategy.

3. Methods

This paper is based on interviews with all local project leaders in the ten participating municipalities in the regional energy-planning project. In advance of the interviews, the municipalities got an offer to get some support from the project if they wanted to engage activities for broader participation in their energy-planning. At the same time the local project leaders received a questionnaire with the instruction to discuss participation in relation to their energy-planning within their organisations. The questionnaire included questions about the municipalities views on stakeholder participation, what kind of stakeholders they would like to address and how. The answers to the questions were then collected through structured interviews with the local project leaders.

The interviews were analysed in the light of the general project status in the municipalities and their organisation of the energy-planning process. The results were categorised according to the goals, methods and target groups for stakeholder participation stated by each municipality. These categories are then discussed in relation to participation literature.

4. Results from interviews

The ten participating municipalities showed different interests in stakeholder participation. Two municipalities declined the offer to arrange activities for stakeholder involvement, one because they have decided to drop out from the regional project and the other since there was no political interest in stakeholder participation at that particular time. Two other expressed an interest, but had no specific ideas about activities since the energy-planning processes had temporarily been postponed, in one case due to the lack of political support and in the other due to the lack of resources. Six municipalities had more pronounced ideas about why and how they would like to involve stakeholders in the energy-planning process. Between these municipalities, however, the interview answers showed different ways of conceptualising participation, with different goals, methods and target groups. These different conceptualisations can be categorised as: participation as capacity building, participation as a way to create acceptance, participation as a way to change behaviour and participation as partnership building.

4.1 Participation as capacity building

The municipalities of Åtvidaberg, Kinda and Mjölby focus their stakeholder participation on local businesses. During the energy-planning process these have been highlighted as key actors in the sustainable development of the local energy system, both as users and producers of energy resources. From the municipalities' point of view, the interest and involvement of local business is thus seen as necessary for successful implementation of the energy-plans. However, there has been a previous lack of interest from local business to participate in energy related projects or campaigns. Many businesses have also commented on the lack of relevant activities, information or educations on energy issues targeted specifically to their needs.

To increase the capacity of local business to participate in the sustainable development of the energy system, the municipalities of Åtvidaberg and Kinda wants to offer educational packages targeting energy issues relevant to the differing categories of local companies. In Mjölby the suggested activities include inspirational seminars on good examples or study visits to successful green businesses. Through these different activities, the municipalities hope to increase awareness and knowledge on energy related issues within the companies, thereby increasing their ability to make environmentally sound energy decision. But the activities are also seen as a way to create an exchange between local companies and the municipality that, in the long run, can lead to joint energy projects or strategic planning.

4.2 Participation as a way to create acceptance

The municipality of Motala has recently updated their energy-plan and is now entering a phase of implementation. Since the plan was produced by external consultants, there is a need to inform and involve a wider range of local stakeholders, including parts of the local authority, before implementing different projects stated in the plan. The suggestion for stakeholder participation formulated in Motala therefore focuses around one of those projects: the implementation of a new system for sorting waste for local biogas production.

Since the success of this new system depends on the acceptance and co-operation of all households in the municipality, there is a great need to both inform householders of the new practices needed and create acceptance for the system. Therefore Motala suggests an extensive information campaign, targeting all households. By explaining the reasons for the new biogas system, as well as environmental, economic and other gains, the local authority hopes to create acceptance for the new system. The information campaign is also aimed to provide the households with the necessary information needed to change the way they

handle their household waste. Through these activities Motala hopes to increase the interest in, and acceptance for, other alternative energy sources as well.

4.3 Participation as a way to change behaviour

The municipality of Söderköping is dependent on a high degree of daily commuting. As a result, the need to change commuting patterns – from private transport by car, to public transport by bus – was highlighted as an important issue for the energy-plan. The suggestions for stakeholder participation therefore targets daily commuters. Different "test groups", consisting of commuters that today go by car, will be given the possibility to commute by bus for free for a month. Through these activities, the municipality hopes to change commuting behaviour. During the test period, the test groups will be asked to keep a "commuter diary" telling of the positive and negative consequences of commuting by bus. The logs will then be published online for other commuters, planners and traffic administrators.

The municipality hopes not only to change the commuting behaviour within the test groups, but also increase awareness among the public and inspire other commuters to change their behaviour. The results from the project are also seen as important input to future development of existing or new systems for public transport.

4.4 Participation through partnership

In Vadstena, the energy-planning process has run parallel to a major revision of the municipal comprehensive plan, putting broad issues of local sustainable development on the agenda. As a part of these planning processes the municipality has already arranged public hearings on energy and climate issues. During those public hearings a mutual interest in biogas emerged between the local authority, local farmers and other biogas related actors, and an idea to extend stakeholder participation took shape within the municipality.

Building on this mutual interest the municipality suggests an open biogas forum where stakeholders interested in biogas production, distribution and use can meet. The forum would consist of regular meetings, mutual educations, study visits and project planning sessions. The purpose of such a forum would be to exchange ideas, experiences and knowledge as well as to explore potentials and problems with the development of new biogas projects. The forum is therefore seen as a platform for partnership building, hopefully resulting in a mutual development program or several biogas projects.

5. Different approaches to stakeholder participation in local energy-planning processes

As the results above indicate, many of the municipalities have an interest in increased stakeholder participation in relation to their energy-planning processes. However, the goals, methods and targeted groups differ widely: from informing large groups within the local community to building long term partnerships with specific interests (table 1).

Taking a closer look at the answers we can see that the municipalities' conceptualise "stakeholders" within the energy process differently; from the general public to more specific groups or actors. It seems, however, that "stakeholder" more often stands for specific groups within the local community, than for "all citizens". The actors viewed as "stakeholders" in relation to energy issues in the community are those actors seen as directly influencing the outcome of certain projects or developments, that is, actors that could facilitate the implementation of the municipal energy-plan (Irvin et al. 2004). This way of conceptualising "stakeholders" in the local energy system, might increase the possibility to involve the targeted stakeholders; they are asked to participate because of their specific relations to a project and the projects or issues at hand are specifically addressed to them (Irvin et al. 2004; Few et al. 2007; Danestig 2009). On the other hand, this may also exclude unorganised local actors, who might not be viewed as directly involved in the issues at hand. The same goes for local actors with a broader interest in environmental-, climate- or energy related issues, as they are not associated to hands-on projects (Ling et al. 2002).

From this discussion on the conceptualisation of "stakeholders" we can also make some remarks on the way the different local authorities conceptualise "participation". In all municipalities that showed interest in "participation", it is given a pragmatic rather than democratic meaning. Within this pragmatic framework, however, participation takes on different meanings within different local authorities; from information campaigns to partnerships. "Participation" in this study range from activities mostly consisting of one way communication of information, knowledge and new practices, to long term co-operation, with the sharing of authority and responsibilities between different local actors in relation to specific projects. These pragmatic ways of conceptualising participation might increase the chance of meaningful co-operations – on suitable levels – between the local authorities and different local actors as participation is given a practical meaning for all actors involved (Quetzal Tritter & McCallum 2006). On the other hand, this pragmatic view might focus

participation activities too much on specific projects, making long term or more democratic dialogue on energy issues more difficult to achieve.

Table 1: Results from interviews about interest in stakeholder participation activities.

Municipality	Target group(s)	Goals with stakeholder participation	Suggested methods
Åtvidaberg, Kinda and Mjölby	Local businesses	Increase the capacity of local businesses to make energy sound decisions Increase exchange between local authorities and businesses	Offering educational packages around energy issues relevant to different categories of local businesses Offering inspirational seminars on good examples and/or study visits to green companies
Motala	Households	To inform and seek acceptance for a new biogas system. To increase awareness and interest in renewable energy	Broad information campaign informing households of the new biogas system and its sub-systems. Inform households about their part in such systems.
Söderköping	Commuters to and from the municipality. Specifically commuters who now travel by car.	To change commuter behaviour in smaller test groups, but also within the general public To get firsthand experiences from new commuters into traffic planning processes	A commuter project giving different test groups the opportunity to travel by bus instead of car. The test groups are asked to log their experiences online
Vadstena	Local farmers and other key actors in a possible future local biogas system	To build partnerships for developing local biogas projects and/or strategic development plans	An open biogas forum for local actors interested in biogas production, distribution and use The forum offers meetings, education, site visits and project planning sessions

6. Concluding remarks

This paper has shown that there are many ways to approach stakeholders in energy-planning, even in this small sample of municipalities. They all however share a common "pragmatic" view on stakeholder participation. Stakeholders are more or less viewed as means to implement the energy-plan, rather than resources that can provide knowledge and experiences to the process. One explanation to this implementation oriented approaches to participation is that the issue of participation was raised rather late in the energy-planning processes. In one case the energy plan was already adopted by the local government.

Previous experiences have shown that the involvement of citizens in the early stages of the energy planning process can contribute substantially to the energy plan (Ivner, 2009b) and also provide an open dialogue in contrast to ordinary remittance procedures (Ivner, 2009a). Early involvement may also lead to a smaller knowledge-gap between the expert planners (or external consultants as in two of the cases here) and stakeholders. However, here is a problem for small municipalities with limited resources in the local authority. In several of the local authorities in this regional project expertise in energy and environmental issues may be limited to one person who is responsible for all kinds of assignments from exercising authority to environmental auditing. In these cases, the effort to produce an energy plan is more than enough for those involved in the energy planning process - involving "outsiders" is not even an issue. It is also important to remember that there is no existing practice for broad stakeholder participation in energy-planning in Sweden today. Even if local authorities are interested in involving the public or local industry, there is little knowledge of "good-examples" to mimic.

Finally, we would like to add that participation in the later stages of, or even after, the energy-planning process is better than no participation at all. Involving stakeholders will be of utmost importance if the local authorities are going to succeed in their role as facilitators in the transition towards sustainable energy systems. With the almost non-existing tradition of involving stakeholders in energy-planning in Sweden today in mind, it can be seen as an important first step to approach stakeholders in relation to joint projects. When dialogue is established it will be easier to continue discussions with these stakeholders concerning more strategic energy issues. When moving from project based interaction to more strategic discussions, it will however be important to keep forums open for new actors, actors that might not be so obviously considered stakeholders in more specific projects.

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