



## Low Carbon Societies Network



### **Summary of Panel Discussion, April 14, 2011 - EUSEW'11 Event: 100 % Renewables and Low-Carbon Scenarios in Europe by 2050. Comparison, Development, Driving Forces, Barriers. Stakeholder Dialogue Experiences from Germany and France.”**

#### **Panel participants:**

- Chairperson: Rebecca Collyer, European Climate Foundation, The Netherlands
- Georges Mercadal, French Council for Public Debates – CNDP, France
- Chris Church, Low Carbon Communities Network, UK
- Myriam Boveda, Energies-Demain, France
- Jan Burck, Germanwatch

#### **Introductions**

The panel debate started with introductory remarks from the panelists, except Jan Burck that had made the last presentation before the [panel](#) debate. Key messages from the introductory remarks (see also presentations in separate files):

##### Chris Church:

Involvement of stakeholders and civil society is a big issue. It is difficult to get people engaged, but to deliver truly sustainable change we must involve civil society, which includes thousands of voluntary organisations. In the UK, there are about 8-10 thousand organisations locally and nationally that we can define as NGOs or as linked to NGOs, but there are some 700,000 community organisations. These include residents and tenants associations, sport clubs, youth groups and networks, ethnic minority organisations, hobby clubs etc. All of them have a stake in a safe and sustainable future. We must reach out beyond just "the usual suspects" (those that have been involved in the debate for a longer period).

Change is not led merely by policies but also by engaged innovators supported by stakeholder pressure. Action on local food came from grass roots concern about lack of access to food growing space and poor quality food in local institutions such as schools. This helped develop a vigorous new local infrastructure which in turn influenced local and national policy while also ensuring better local food.

The need to promote the important role of communities as active stakeholders with a clear agenda has led the Low Carbon Communities Network to join with other UK network to form the 'Communities and Climate Action Alliance'. This helps improve networking and has also led to better work with national government.

He highlighted that participative and representative democracy are two sides of the same coin; we should not undermine the interest of people who have chosen to participate even if they are not (formally) representative.

He ended his presentation with reminding the audience that to engage effectively, especially with younger people, we should use the new social media (Twitter, Facebook etc.).

##### Myriam Boveda:

She started by explaining the work of Energies Demain that organises local debates with French regions that have obligations to implement regional climate strategies until mid 2011.

Energies Demain is engaged in translating stakeholder comments into the climate strategies, writing the stories of stakeholders into the scenarios. the following actions are believed to deliver good results :

- Identify and get **all the key persons** involved (people who have an understanding and stg. to express) : key to the effectiveness/credibility of the consultation – good organization : not time consuming, prepare the aspects each person you think could contribute to, ensure them a follow up of how they views are taken into account
- Work on precise/closed specific questions (objective: buildings retrofitting/ need: training of people – subdivide questions in sub-questions (who to train – quantity – fields)
- Work within smaller groups (a brief general introduction can take place)
- Move from technical vocabulary to images/references people can relate to (ex : ambitious scenario concerning cycling = Amsterdam)

They often use a method, where they present two scenarios and ask the stakeholders to make stories around both of them. This is a tool to get comments to policies and to scenarios. She gave an example on how it could show interests and oppositions to possible future transport systems. She ended by asking if we use the right tools to involve stakeholders?

#### Georges Mercadal:

He started by introducing the French council for public debates, which is a special structure, it is independent French authority for public debates. It is given the task to organize public debates in crucial issues, including investments above 300 mill.€ with of environmental concern.

He then gave an example of a debate the council had organized on the question of nuclear waste disposal. The debate included 16 meetings of stakeholders and public. The debate had some effects on the decision in the French Parliament on nuclear waste. For instance was the scope increased to all nuclear matters. Some proposals from the debate were not included, such as a proposal to maintain the waste in a perennial storage instead of in a geological repository, where the waste is unretrievable. He also mentioned a debate where the decision was taken before the planned debate was over. He found that unacceptable and that the council should not engage in debates, when the decision makers would not wait until the end of the debate.

His conclusions regarding public debates:

- no decision must be taken before the debate is over
- he advises to follow-up with a working group to laws adopted following the debate
- the debate should also lead to further research about critical issues that have been raised in the debate
- the debate attracts mainly critical voices, but in this way it gives a good overview of all the concern that stakeholders and citizens have. This is useful knowledge.

### **Comments from Panel:**

The panel then made a round of comments. Key messages from this round:

Chris Church: There is large difference between stakeholder engagement in positive scenarios, and involvement in protests against projects that we do not want. This is also the case for stakeholder involvements. It is difficult to attract a long-term interest in positive scenarios, but we must do it.

Georges Mecardal: I see three issues that give protests in the sustainable scenarios:

- power lines, people do not like them in their neighborhood'
- models, are black boxes that people do not understand and therefore do not trust. This is a problem even if environmentalists are behind them.
- sequestration of CO<sub>2</sub> (CCS), people are not certain a CO<sub>2</sub> storage a few hundred meters down would not make any harm.

Regarding CCS he proposed to study the debate of nuclear waste, where the original proposal was to put it just 400 m down underground.

Myriam Boveda: Highlighted that when we talk about social media: do we know what we are working with and how we can use it for different (younger) ages of the population?

## Questions and comments from the audience:

- Stephane La Branche (France): I am not convinced that the parallelism between nuclear energy and CCS is working concerning social acceptability. Facebook and other social media have to be accompanied by other tools; they do not show a picture of the public's interest in an issue.
- Participant (journalist): I have counted the tweets about this event (EUSEW) so this event hardly uses the social media we speak about.
- Participant: (Poland): How was the media coverage in France after Fukushima? In Polish media the accident was used as an argument in favor of nuclear power.
- Participant: How we can move people away from NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) reactions against sustainable energy like wind mills, and transmission line connected to it?

## Answers from the panelists:

### Myriam Boveda:

- She is watching French, Spanish, Belgium, and German media:

The post Fukushima media coverage were very different in these countries.

- French media were (in particular in the beginning) confident that nuclear power plants in France are safe. It was even reported that the high safety levels on French nuclear could be an advantage for the French nuclear industry.

### Georges Mecardal:

He found a lack of transparency within the Fukushima debate, but he found there was a high information level from ASN (Autorité de Sûreté Nucléaire) with daily statements during the crisis. Further the chairmen of the ASN said that *"We cannot say that it is impossible to have such an accident in France."*

### Chris Church:

First he reminded us not to forget the Aarhus Convention that obliges countries to involve the public in environmental decision-making.

Then he commented on the social media: Social media, such as direct twitter exchange with the public cannot replace "face to face" from one day to the other- but it is starting to replace some part of it. While social media does not replace physical media, we should use them to get in contact with new people. Regarding nuclear debate, he reported that there has not been a large debate on nuclear in the UK, following Fukushima. Which is a big contrast to the debate in Germany.

Related to the issues discussed, he mentioned that there is a lack of trust in the UK: At a recent Eurostat survey twice as many as in other EU countries answered that they do not trust anybody concerning information on environment

On how to deal with the NIMBY reactions, he found that it is important to get stakeholders well into the discussion up from the beginning. If people have the impression to get heard they can change opinion, but this need a really transparent participation process. There must be money and time to involve local population.

There should be prior informed consent to investments from affected citizens.

### Rebecca Collyer also responded:

It is a general problem with opposition to overhead transmission lines, but stakeholders can also change opinion. One of the usually strongest opponent, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds/Birdlife have changed opinion during the process of long term dialogues with climate NGOs and others, as they see the benefit in renewable electricity and power lines instead of climate change that will destroy more bird habitats in the long-term than overhead lines would if sited correctly.

### Jan Burck commented:

- Regarding the Nimby problem, one solution is to cluster infrastructure projects, so windmills can be installed along motorways, where the nature is destroyed already.

- Regarding CCS and nuclear waste: if you go to Northern Germany you will see the same opposition; the population does not make a difference, and it is basically the same campaign against nuclear waste underground repositories and CCS.

*Summary by Gunnar Boye Olesen, INFORSE-Europe and Meike Fink, Reaseu Action Climat - France.*

See program and presentations at <http://www.lowcarbon-societies.eu/index.php?id=46>