

How a pre-existing social license to operate
diminishes due to inadequate public participation:
learning from the Wieringermeer wind farm



Colophon

Title: How a pre-existing social license to operate diminishes due to inadequate public participation: learning from the Wieringermeer wind farm

Author: K. (Kristian) Kuut

Contact: k.kuut@student.rug.nl

Student number: s3219275

Program: Human Geography and Planning

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University: University of Groningen

Faculty: Spatial Sciences

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Supervisor: Mr. PhD P. (Philippe) Hanna de Almeida Oliveira

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Abstract

In many cases, the planning and construction process for wind farm projects appears to be a complicated matter. Despite the positive attitude towards wind power, local wind farm projects often face strong opposition. This study aims to examine how public participation contributes to the acceptance of citizens towards wind farms. This thesis is based on qualitative data collected from residents living in the vicinity of a Dutch large-scale onshore wind farm. Besides, an interview has been conducted with an employee of the municipality of Hollands-Kroon. The results show that a perception of acceptance was prevalent in the wind farm activities prior to the planning process. However, the perceived participation and engagement methods in the planning and construction process resulted in a decrease in the acceptability of the initiators' activities. In fact, the findings demonstrate that residents' participation in the planning process was relatively passive, and their participation was limited. Thus, it appears that the quality of the interactions in public participation is essential. It is not merely the amount of participation that plays a part. Instead, it is the need for the quality of these participation methods.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Sustainable energy supply is one of the significant challenges in contemporary society, as the effects of fossil fuels result in environmental pollution and global warming (Gielen et al., 2019). Therefore, targets are being set all over the world to reduce emissions. Also, in the Netherlands, the political debate has shifted in reducing carbon emissions (Ros, 2015). Although there are different types of renewable energy sources, such as hydropower and solar energy, it is primarily the installed capacity of wind energy that is steadily increasing in the Netherlands (Linders et al., 2020). That is due to increasingly larger wind turbines and an expanding number of wind turbines being placed on the land. Also, in the Wieringermeer, this is the situation where an additional 81 wind turbines have been constructed within three years (Ekker, 2020).

1.2 Societal relevance

The present energy transition is part of the effort to mitigate climate change. Due to the energy transition, there is an expectation of switching to alternative energy sources. One of these sources of energy is wind power. As wind power becomes increasingly important as an energy source, many additional wind turbines are being built and constructed in the coming years (Schram, 2021). However, the placement of wind farms also encounters difficulties in the surrounding area for residents, such as noise nuisance and cast shadow.

This is evident in the case of the Wieringermeer wind farm, but also at other wind farms in the Netherlands, such as the Delfzijl Zuid wind farm and the Zeewolde wind farm (RTV Noord, 2017; De Stentor, 2018). As a result, action groups frequently arise against wind farms' arrival. Besides, this often results in various online protest petitions (Lammers, 2017). Thus, it is not only of interest to comprehend the role that public participation serves in obtaining a social license to operate (SLO); it is equally vital how acceptance by residents can be achieved now and in the future for projects that are ultimately in the interest of all.

1.3 Scientific relevance

Empirical evidence analyzing citizens' acceptance of wind energy projects in relation to the SLO remains limited. Many major companies, especially those in the extractive industries and increasingly now also those in other sectors, explicitly mention SLO when describing their activities (Dare et al., 2014). However, what the SLO entails and how a company can obtain it remains unclear (Parsons & Moffat, 2014).

One part of it, at least, is the acceptance by the citizenry (Jijelava & Vanclay, 2017; Thomson and Boutilier, 2011). The literature points to the suggestion that meaningful citizen participation contributes to the acceptance by the citizenry (Langer et al., 2017). This has also endeavored in the case of the Wieringermeer. However, acceptance by residents is far from being achieved in this particular case. Despite considerable citizen participation, there is quite some resistance to the wind farm (Ekker, 2020; Houtekamers & Rengers, 2020). At the same time, the scientific literature tells us otherwise. Apparently, the scientific literature is not yet sufficiently accurate to encompass its empirical reality. Therefore, this thesis seeks to provide a more conclusive answer as to why resistance arose in the Wieringermeer wind farm despite the high level of participation.

1.4 Objectives and research question

The purpose of this study is twofold. Firstly, it aims to contribute to the body of literature regarding a SLO by examining how public participation contributes to achieving a SLO. Secondly, this study attempts to discover how residential acceptance towards wind farm projects can be (re)created and endured now and in the near future.

A research question was formulated to gather more insights regarding a SLO in the context of the Wieringermeer windfarm: *“What is the perception of residents and policymakers around the planning and construction of the Wieringermeer wind farm concerning public participation, and what role does that perception play in whether or not obtaining and retaining a SLO?”*

Three sub-questions were formulated to attain an answer to the research question. First of all, the municipality conducted several engagement methods during and after the implementation of the wind farm. Throughout the first sub-question, it examines how these engagement methods have been implemented and how the community does regard them. Therefore, the first sub-question reads as follows: *“What engagement methods were used in the realization of the Wieringermeer wind farm?”*

After defining and observing the different engagement methods, this thesis explores identifying residents' experiences around the planning and construction of the wind farm. Based on residents' experiences, their degree of engagement can be ascribed to within the project. Thus, the second sub-question of the research is: *“What are the experiences of local residents concerning the planning and construction impacts of the Wieringermeer wind farm?”*

The final sub-question addresses suggested incentives by residents to enhance citizen engagement. From these suggestions, recommendations are made up, outlining how to aim for more meaningful participation. For this reason, the third sub-question states: *“What recommendations can be drawn from local residents regarding their perception of engagement in the Wieringermeer wind farm project?”*

1.5 Reading guide

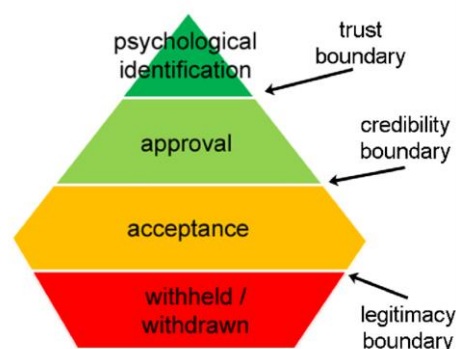
This thesis comprises a set of six chapters in total. The next chapter, chapter 2, further discusses the key concepts used in this thesis. The chapter after that elaborates on the different applied research methods and the specific case being studied. The fourth chapter illustrates the results for the case of the Wieringermeer wind farm. Chapter five discusses the findings and provides nuance to the proposed conclusion. The final chapter attempts to provide an answer to the main research question.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Social license to operate

According to Thomson and Boutilier (2011), a social license to operate (SLO) is a community's perception of the acceptability of a company and its local operations. Thomson and Boutilier (2011) identified a continuum of four levels of the SLO, which is shown in figure 1. They claim that the level of SLO granted to a company is inversely related to the level of socio-political risk a company faces. A lower SLO indicates a higher risk.

Figure 1: The “pyramid” model of the SLO proposed by Thomson & Boutilier (2011)



The lowest level of SLO is having the social license withheld or withdrawn. It implies that the project is in danger of restricted access to essential resources (e.g., financing, legal licenses, raw material, labor, markets, public infrastructure). Losing a social license represents an extremely high socio-political risk. The next highest level of SLO is acceptance of the project. In figure 1, this layer covers the greatest area to indicate that it is the common level of the social license granted. If the company establishes its credibility, the social license rises to the level of approval. Over time, if trust is established, the social license could rise to the level of psychological identification, where the level of socio-political risk is deficient. The work of Thomson and Boutilier identifies four factors that constitute the three levels of SLO. Table 1 outlines how to determine where a company is located within the SLO.

Table 1: Four Factors Constituting Three Levels of SLO (Thomson & Boutilier, 2011)

Level & Label	Description	Role in determining SLO levels as described in Thomson & Boutilier (2011) Pyramid Model
1. Economic legitimacy	The perception that the project/company offers a benefit to the perceiver.	If lacking, most stakeholders will withhold or withdraw the SLO. If present, many will grant an acceptance level of SLO.
2a. Socio-political legitimacy	The perception that the project/company contributes to the well-being of the region, respects the local way of life, meets expectations about its role in society, and acts according to stakeholders' views of fairness.	If lacking, approval level of SLO is less likely. If both this and interactional trust (2a & 2b) are lacking, approval level is rarely granted by any stakeholder.
2b. Interactional trust	The perception that the company and its management listens, responds, keeps promises, engages in mutual dialogue, and exhibits reciprocity in its interactions.	If lacking, approval level of SLO is less likely. If both this and sociopolitical legitimacy (2a & 2b) are lacking, approval level is rarely granted.
3. Institutionalized trust	The perception that relations between the stakeholders' institutions (e.g., the community's representative organizations) and the project/company are based on an enduring regard for each other's interests.	If lacking, psychological identification is unlikely. If lacking but both socio-political legitimacy and interactional trust are present (2a & 2b), most stakeholders will grant approval level of SLO.

The SLO concept originated within the extractive industry. Two reasons are given for this. First of all, the geographically bound nature of their operations means that companies have a limited choice regarding where to operate. They must extract where the resource is, and as such minimizing local opposition is of importance (Thomson & Boutilier, 2011). Secondly, the disruptive and damaging nature of extractive activities means that local approval will be difficult to obtain (ibid). However, this does not directly mean that the concept of SLO can only be applied in the context of extractive industries. There is a solid argument to be made for the applicability of the SLO concept to the onshore wind industry. As with the extractive industry, wind farms can have a significant and disruptive impact on rural landscapes (Hall et al., 2015) and, in places, face vocal opposition (Hall et al., 2013). On top of that, like extractive industries, they must be located where there is the potential for wind power (Cetinay et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, there has been much discussion on the value of the concept of a SLO. The debate includes what constitutes a SLO and how to measure it (Prno, 2013; Bice, 2014). Given the lack of a fully-developed understanding, some writers have questioned the usefulness of the concept (Owen and Kemp,

2013; Bice, 2014). Firstly, Owen and Kemp (2013) argue that the contemporary application of a social license is more about reducing overt opposition to its industry than about engagement for long-term development. Secondly, Bice (2014) states that, while the concept of a social license is most certainly deemed important by companies, it remains unclear how companies determine whether they have garnered a license. Additionally, gaps also exist between the theory underpinning the social license and how the attainment of a social licensee is actualized (ibid).

However, it is most definitely a useful concept, being it widely used in practice. For instance, this is demonstrated in the case of the Wieringermeer wind farm by the following quote from a council employee about their role as municipality within the project: “But of course it is also about creating a basis of support. And as a municipality you have an explicit role in this, in the direction towards your residents.” [respondent 1].

Moreover, Jijelava & Vanclay (2017) have been one of the few scholars who demonstrated the applicability of the SLO concept in practice. The model, initially developed by Thomson and Boutilier (2011), has been modified by further elaborating its underpinning concepts of legitimacy, credibility and trust. The authors expanded on these concepts by making the SLO concept clearer, more relevant and applicable in different contexts. Thus, in the work of Jijelava & Vanclay (2017), the concepts are refined in such a way that they are applicable to operationalize.

Although their research demonstrates that the legitimacy barrier has been passed based on economic and socio-political legitimacy, the authors fall short in terms of legal legitimacy, even though they mention legal legitimacy as a dimension that plays a part in obtaining the basic level of SLO. For that reason, this thesis seeks to address the dimension of legal legitimacy and to what extent it is influential in gaining or losing the basic level of SLO, acceptance. According to Jijelava & Vanclay (2017), legal legitimacy is the perception about whether the regulatory processes and procedures have been appropriately followed and the decision-making fair.

Jijelava & Vanclay's (2017) definition of legal legitimacy is nevertheless quite broad; that is why this thesis draws on the concept of public participation to guide the definition of legal legitimacy. In particular, this thesis examines how the quality of participation plays a role in the dimension of legal legitimacy. It is, therefore, not only a matter of getting involved in the process of participating; instead, it is about the quality of these participation processes prior to the presence of legal legitimacy. Thereby, the following section discusses the concept of public participation.

2.2 Public participation

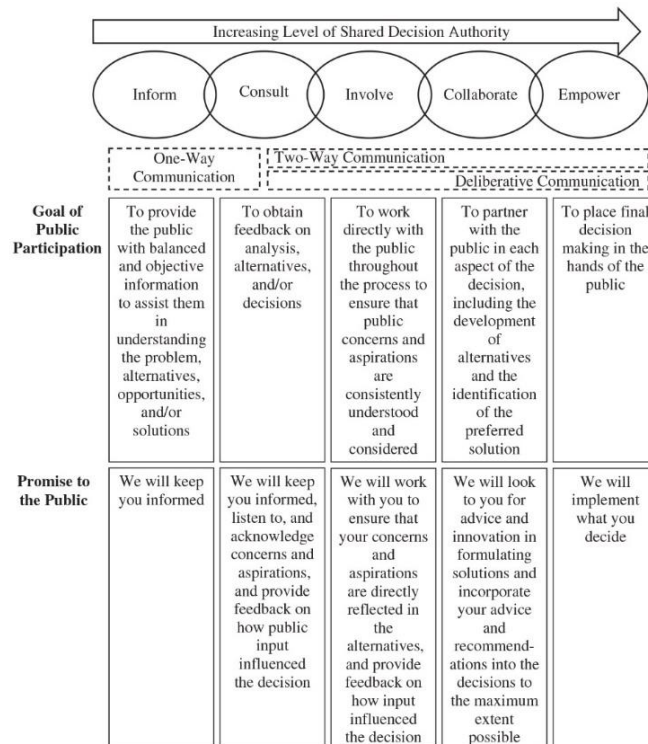
Various participation modes have been of interest across all major energy policy fields such as nuclear energy, renewable energy, energy efficiency and smart grid development (Langer et al., 2017; Bauwens & Devine-Wright, 2018). These modes refer to a diverse set of practices which involves the public in project planning and project realization. Not only participation mode and citizen acceptance are crucial but also the issue of who is involved, how early and how often in the process (Ngar-yin Mah & Hills, 2014). According to Gustafson et al. (2015), involving the public at different stages in wind energy projects using participatory methods can be a tool for more effective processes to inform citizens and let them have a particular influence on the decision. On top of that, they state that municipalities are important factors in improving energy efficiency and environmental sustainability.

However, the concept of public participation is rather vague. Nevertheless, it is a concept that has received attention from various researchers (Arnstein, 1969; Fung, 2006; Gustafson et al., 2015; Ngar-yin Mah & Hills, 2014). *Public participation* is commonly defined as the involvement of citizens in decision-making with the aim of influencing the choices that are made. This definition aligns with Arnstein's (1969) pioneering work on participation. She first developed the participation ladder, a typology of public participation that consists of eight different levels of participation: manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. These

levels reflect three broad categories: non-participation, tokenism, and citizen power. Each level represents an extensive group, and the ladder embodies more of an altogether than individual steps.

It was the first time that words were used to say something meaningful about the quality of public participation. In doing so, Arnstein had developed the first step in coming up with a language that revealed something about the quality of participation by the citizenry. That these words turn out to be not the most accurate is not astonishing. More accurate descriptions have been presented regarding the degree of public participation in the years since, as seen with Fung's (2006) Democracy Cube, which contains three different continuums by which forms of direct participation move, which subsequently is formulated into a three-dimensional model. Nevertheless, the idea of coming up with a ladder is critical to argue the added value of citizen participation. In contrast, it was mostly a container term used casually by citizens and policymakers to argue for legitimate decision-making back then.

Figure 2: Spectrum of Public Participation (IAP2, adapted by Tina Nabatchi)



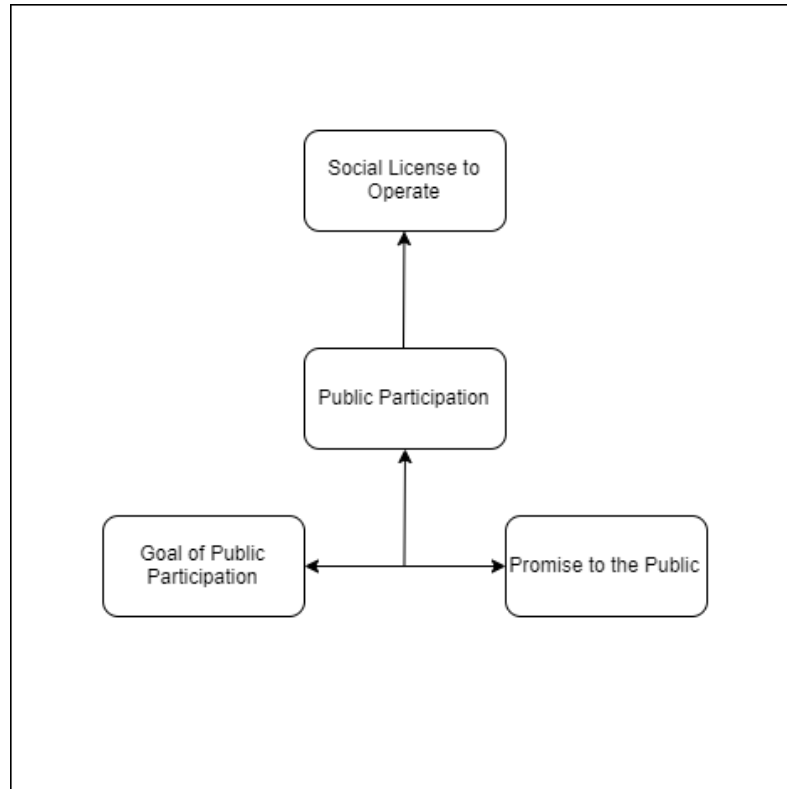
Arnstein's classification still contains valuable tools for understanding public participation. However, many scholars since then have criticized Arnstein's ladder (Collins & Ison, 2006; Tritter and McCallum, 2006; Haywood et al., 2005). Besides, it has already been revitalized in various aspects. Arnstein's classification still contains valuable tools for understanding public participation. However, many scholars since then have criticized Arnstein's ladder (Collins & Ison, 2006; Tritter and McCallum, 2006; Haywood et al., 2005). Besides, it has already been revitalized in various aspects. It has been adapted, for example, by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), which developed the Spectrum of Public Participation. The spectrum builds on previous studies by Arnstein (1969), Rocha(1997), and Hart (1992), among others.

The spectrum, which can be found in figure 2, describes five general modes of public participation in democratic decision-making on the continuum of increasing community influence. Importantly, the model describes not only the goals of a given mode of public participation, but also the "promise" that each mode communicates - whether implicitly or explicitly - to the public. Within the study context, this framework is used to represent the degree of meaningful participation. It is a two-dimensional framework and offers, for that reason, a better empirical reality compared to Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation.

2.3 Conceptual model

Figure 3 depicts the conceptual model used in this research to gather data and analyze the findings. The conceptual model shows the main concepts and their relation towards each other. This conceptual model is based on the previously described theoretical framework.

Figure 3: Conceptual model (author, 2022)



3. Methodology

3.1 Case study method

This thesis uses a case study to analyze its theoretical course of action deeply. A *case study* is a methodology that is ideal for small-scale, in-depth research. Gerring (2007) defines the case study approach as an "intensive study of a single unit or a small number of units, for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units." Within the context of the case study, qualitative data methods are used. Yin (2014) explains that qualitative research can uncover links among different actors and phenomena, relevant for studying the 'why' and 'how' of a particular issue, process, or situation.

3.2 Case description

The Wieringermeer wind farm consists of 99 wind turbines, which makes it the largest on-shore wind farm in the Netherlands. The wind farm is located in the Wieringermeerpolder, which is visualized in figure 4. The region is a polder in the northern part of the Dutch province of North Holland and is relatively sparsely populated compared to the rest of the province. The majority of the area has a function for agricultural purposes.

place online. In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were given the option whether the interview was preferred to be conducted online or face-to-face.

The discussed topics included questions about the experiences regarding public participation prior to, during, and after the wind farm's construction. As such, it provided insight into the expectations and realities surrounding the arrival of the wind farm. The interview, which was conducted with the municipality employee, had a different format, as the relevance was more regarding how the municipality approached its objective revolving around public participation. All of the interviews have been audio recorded with a mobile phone. The audio has been transcribed using the software program Sonix.

Recruiting for participants was done via several methods. Firstly, through an acquaintance, I managed to connect with a resident living near the Wieringermeer wind farm. Through this resident, I had been able to contact more residents, which can be approached as a snowball method (Clifford et al., 2016). This method provided the opportunity to approach more potential respondents for the study. However, none of the approached residents was willing to conduct an interview. The unsuccessful snowball methods resulted in problems getting in touch with residents around the area. Eventually, a message was posted via a Facebook Group named “Toekomst Wieringermeer” (*The Future of Wieringermeer*), requesting if any residents were willing to be interviewed. The content of the post can be found in appendix 2. This message resulted in a few more respondents.

3.5 Ethical considerations

It is essential to be transparent about the purpose of the research to behave ethically. Ethical behavior also applies during the process of data collection and analysis. Since the data collection involved conducting interviews, the interviewees were sent a consent form via email. They were formally asked whether they agreed with the interview being recorded at the beginning of the interview. The consent form, which can be found in the third appendix, included an agreement of participating in the interview. In addition, the interviewee retained the right to remain anonymous and the ability to correct the transcripts for factual inaccuracies. The collected information from interviews will not be used without permission for purposes other than what is stated beforehand.

4. Results

4.1 Engagement methods utilized in the Wieringermeer wind farm

This section describes the different engagement methods that are utilized in the Wieringermeer wind farm. These methods are specified in the municipality's policy document regarding public participation (Cools, 2011). Only the relevant methods are discussed in this chapter. The other methods, such as the “financial participation” and “polder electricity” are not of interest to be discussed, as they have been dismissed early on. In addition, quotes from residents are provided to more accurately frame their perception of the engagement methods. For clarity, the first sub-question is reiterated, as it states: “*What engagement methods were used in the realization of the Wieringermeer wind farm?*”

4.1.1 Neighborhood Regulation

Annually, the wind farm initiators, Vattenfall and ECN Wind Energy Facilities (EWEF), make an amount of € 429.000 available that is divided among approximately 330 addresses. These addresses receive an average of about 100 euros per month per household, as compensation for the nuisance of noise and the cast shadow from the turbines (Rengers & Houtekamer, 2020). The Neighborhood Regulation does, however, not apply to residents who already participate financially in the Wieringermeer wind farm as well as to local residents living in residential areas (ibid.).

A respondent who was eligible for the Neighborhood Regulation gave her perspective on this regulation: “Yes, it's a bit of a band-aid on the wounds, I think. It's a bit like, yes, if it's not there, you've got nothing. But, of course, it doesn't cover the load. No, it doesn't cover it, certainly not.” [respondent 2]. The reason that residents who are eligible for the Neighborhood Regulation are still left with a bitter aftertaste is twofold. First of all, for them, the compensation they receive from the neighbor regulation does not outweigh the wind turbines which are placed in their backyard. Second, and most importantly, the Neighborhood Regulation also creates a sense of friction in the community. Although nearby residents are partially compensated, this is disproportionate to the parcels of land that have been bought from farmers for the construction of wind turbines. A disparity in wealth has been created through this process. The same respondent describes her sense of the resulting division in the area in a way that I, as author, could not have articulated more accurately: “I think it also very much depends on the way you look upon it. After all, if Vattenfall, then still Nuon, had approached us, while we had a piece of land, and they offered you the grand price for a piece of, well, how much is it? Then of course you would feel very different from how we would feel about it, euh, the people who have no land or who do have land, but just not the land where such a turbine ends up. We see it in a different light.”. The above two quotes of the respondent reveal, despite the regulation made for residents living in the vicinity of a wind turbine, that it does not provide the desired effect for which it is intended. As a result, polarization has occurred within the community, which becomes clear of the following illustration, after a farmer had concealed for a long time that a line of wind turbines would cross his land. A farmer, who lives on the same road as the farmer whereby wind turbines are placed across his land told: “We, the neighbors found out, and now the street barbecue has been canceled and the women don't come to each other's birthday.” (Rengers & Houtekamer, 2020).

4.1.2 Wind fund Wieringermeer

Since 2014, the Dutch Wind Energy Association's (NWEA) Code of Conduct on Acceptance and Participation of Wind on Land has been in effect (NWEA et al., 2020). Within this code of conduct, the question is posed as to how the revenues from wind energy projects can (partially) flow back to the surrounding area. The initiators of the Wieringermeer wind farm have implemented this by raising a Wind fund, in which they contribute an amount of €100.000 each year (Vattenfall & EWEF, n.d.). Residents and community institutions within a 3.5 kilometer radius of the Wieringermeerpolder can submit initiatives that qualify for funding, although, the board of the fund decides which initiatives will be financed. Whereas at other wind farms in the Netherlands a citizens' cooperative is in charge of the fund (RVO, n.d.). In addition, the board, which determines which projects are granted funding, is not made up of any citizens. By contrast, the board of the Wind fund is composed by the environmental council of the Wieringermeer wind farm and the initiators of the wind farm (LADA, 2019).

Partly due to the fact that the board makes decisions related to the submitted initiatives, there is a relatively small degree of citizen involvement. In the end, the board determines where the funds will be spent on. A resident expressed her opinion about this situation as follows: “Guys, if we're going to make such an impact on this entire region, it has to benefit the region [...] So I would have said the Farmers' Cooperative is too small. It should be a citizens' cooperative. [...] You have in Gelderland or Overijssel citizen cooperatives. Yes, and here they are happy if for example a cooperative supports a soccer field. Yes okay, I think that's just peanuts. They really should have done something that would have made a difference for the community.” The quote reveals that this citizen is advocating for a different set-up with respect to how the Wind fund is constructed. Moreover, it shows that the fund is not very accessible to the citizens. Possibly, more support would have been acquired if residents had a voice in these final decisions.

4.1.3 Poldermolen

In the Green Deal Windpark Wieringermeer, it was agreed that residents would be allowed to invest in the Poldermolen. The Poldermolen is an initiative that originates from the beginning of the Wieringermeer wind farm plan. During its initial development, the idea was conceived that residents of

the Wieringermeer should also benefit from the proceeds of the wind farm (Deutekom, 2019). In order to create sufficient support for hundred turbines, a wind turbine was proposed in which the residents could participate through a contribution, the Poldermolen. By buying shares in the so-called Poldermolen, it was possible to contribute.

However, the Poldermolen never got off the ground. The Board of Mayor and Aldermen informed the cooperative as follows: "We want clarity. There is insufficient support for a solitary turbine close to Wieringerwerf. The cooperative has been given time to demonstrate the support base among the population, but even an extension of that deadline has failed. Then it's time to put an end to it." (Deutekom, 2019). However, imperceptibly, the original meaning of support, the Poldermolen as a means to increase support for the wind farm, was altered to a requirement for sufficient participation, which, in fact, is evident from the following: an alliance, consisting of different stakeholders, was charged with setting up a cooperative to recruit participants for the Poldermolen (Bodegom, 2020). After examining the plan, they immediately let it be known that the municipality set impossible requirements. Apart from the financial feasibility, 2800 households and 160 companies had to participate in order to realize the turbine (ibid.).

On top of that, the cooperative had to maintain their environmental permit through a legal dispute with the college, as the municipality threatened to revoke it for not meeting the support threshold. The final strike was dealt at a council meeting in February 2018. Here, the alderman defended the college's view by not granting the allocated site to the cooperative, resulting in the Poldermolen project being stalled.

The Poldermolen project thus appears to be another broken promise in addition to the Wind fund. Where the influence of citizens in the Wind fund is marginal, the Poldermolen has been a project where citizens have not benefited at all. A resident, whose backyard is facing the wind farm, said the following about the Poldermolen: "There has been some activity at one point so that citizens could also participate more in it. So there was a plan to establish a wind turbine here that you, as citizens, could buy a share in. But the municipality averted this in all sorts of ways. That wind turbine was never installed." [Respondent 3]. On questioning whether, in his opinion, there was public support for the Poldermolen, he continued: "There was a part of citizens who were willing to do that and you could buy certificates from that Wind fund. Or yes, in any case it was a wind turbine that would be installed for the citizens and they would also have the benefits of this. And now we are allowed to look at it (*the wind farm*), but we have nothing to gain from it.". It shows that the engagement methods proposed to local residents were intended to create a perception of approval for the wind farm, which should lead to a SLO. However, the way these methods were conducted reveals the opposite. The residents' sense of justice is undermined, and so is their trust in the public authorities.

4.2 Residents' experiences regarding their engagement

The previous section exposed the benefit-sharing strategies applied during the planning and construction of the wind farm. This section of the chapter further explores residents' experiences about their involvement at different stages in the wind farm project. An effort is made to answer the second sub-question of this thesis. For the sake of clarity, the second sub-question is revisited, which states: "*What are the experiences of local residents concerning the planning and construction impacts of the Wieringermeer wind farm?*" Based on the conducted interviews, it attempts to place the experiences and feelings of residents regarding the engagement methods within the theoretical framework of the thesis.

After conducting the interviews, it became abundantly clear that at first glance, there seems to be little to no aversion towards generating wind energy through onshore wind turbines. Many residents are receptive to the energy transition and understand the shift to cleaner energy sources. Respondent [1] states on this point the following: "The wind farm, in particular, does not bring any benefits, but I see it in a bigger picture: it is, of course, green energy for the Netherlands, I suppose.". This quote is substantiated by respondent [3] after he expressed his opinion about the wind farm before it was constructed: "At the time, I was an advocate that we should green up a bit more. I thought it was a good

plan to have more green energy.". Other respondents came up with similar statements that they were not averse to wind energy and were sympathetic to the wind farm at the time. It turns out that there is in advance support for the wind farm's construction. There is little to no local opposition throughout the wind farm planning. At this stage in the project, the operators of the wind farm appear to be in the level of "approval" or even the level of "psychological identification" within the SLO framework of Thomson and Boutilier (2011).

However, the perception of residents regarding the wind farm does not appear to be static. Respondents' mindset has changed over time. Respondent [1] said the following, reflecting that: "Yes, it has become very negative. From positive to very negative.". He provided the following explanation for this in which he additionally refers to the Wind Weekend, one of the first informational meetings concerning the proposed wind farm: "No, but I don't think you could have ever visually imagined it like that. [...] In the old Domain Office, there was a Wind Weekend where you could get information. I attended that. They also told me a few things. But I never imagined that it would ever look like this. The wind turbines that were there at the time were so small. And yes, well, you could hear some of those too, but the bigger ones, with all the hissing and all those lights. Yes if more had been known back then, I would have been more willing to agitate against it.". Another respondent confirmed the belief that residents had a perception that the wind turbines in the wind farm would be in accordance with the already present wind turbines in the Wieringermeer. Respondent [7], who had quite a poetic way of narrating, described the wind farm in relation to its residents with an appropriate metaphor: "So many flickering lights around you. Yeah, and high too. So you feel very much in the depths. And those turbines with those flickering lights they overwhelm you. These make people feel that it really isn't even a speck of dust after all, but even less than a speck of dust. You're basically nothing at all with all those flickering lights around you. I think that's very unfortunate and I'm not the only one. An awful lot of residents think this is a pity and no one was prepared for such a flickering landscape. The turbines here didn't have that at that time. [...] So the experience of those huge rows of flicker machines. I never had that before.".

The above quotes unveil two aspects by which perceptions about the company and its local activities have been reshaped. First of all, the residents could not have envisioned a change of landscape. Second, the wind farm caused nuisances that residents did not consider beforehand. The wind farm induced impacts, such as noise and light pollution, that residents were unaware of in advance. At this stage, residents started to question themselves: could we have known that the wind turbines would be so large? Did we know that these wind turbines would be equipped with red flickering lights? During the construction of the wind farm, residents slowly feel that they have not been appropriately informed about the potential impacts of the wind farm. One plausible explanation is that the project developer tried to minimize the predicted impacts to gain approval among the local population without considering that the public would realize this at some point in the wind farm operation. As a result, the level of "approval" and "psychological identification" seems to have diminished. As respondent [1] described in his quote, if he had known what the wind farm would look like, he would have agitated against it.

Nevertheless, one respondent mentioned that he had been aware of the installation of flickering lights on the wind turbines. He expressed this as his only negative impact of the wind farm. For this reason, he attended a public information meeting to ask what could be done about this. He shared the following story about this meeting: "Well, that's something, the idea we will take with us, so in that spirit it was said, right? [...] The big scheme of these processes in an initial phase, when everything is still informal, a lot seems possible, but eventually, in the formal phase, it is often disappointing. And then it's no longer the PR people (*Public Relations*), so to speak, and the information officers who determine what the atmosphere is like, but the lawyers in the formal phase. Yes, and then it suddenly turns out that much, much less or nothing at all is possible." [Respondent 5]. The issue regarding light pollution was even the subject of a lawsuit up to the Supreme Court in which citizens faced the lawyers. The same respondent described his experience at the Supreme Court as follows: "No, no, there was no responsive action. Then first the lawyers try to declare you not admissible at all because you are not an interested

party. Yes, that's where it starts, that you think the tone is already wrong. It was quite disappointing. Yes, especially from the Supreme Court. You expect something from that, don't you?". The quotes reveal how the wind farm developer switches from using their PR staff during the consultation to using lawyers in the formal process. This switch demonstrates a massive shift in the conversation's tone, thus reflecting the loss of the developer's SLO. Moreover, it shows an escalation of conflict with the community.

The above paragraph shows that there opportunities were available for citizens to express their views. An information evening had been organized for residents to obtain information and posed their questions concerning the wind farm. The quotes from respondent [5] suggest that the degree of public participation took a "consultative approach" in the course of this meeting. However, there has been little heeding of the alternative options advocated by the citizenry for the impact they experience as a result of light pollution. While it was acknowledged that citizens had concerns about light pollution, public input has not influenced the choices made to mitigate the impact. As a result, citizens' perceptions of credibility were affected significantly. Citizens have now pinned their hopes on an alternative system. Although, their confidence in a good outcome seems to have disappeared, as described by respondent [5]: "We've got our hopes up now on some signals coming in that there would be a system that those lights would only turn on when there's an aircraft in the vicinity. [...] Yes, but then again, whether that's going to be applied? We are rather euh, yes, a bit skeptical anyway.". It demonstrates a sense of reticence on the part of citizens. At the same time, there used to be a feeling that opportunities were available for citizens through a process of participation. That sentiment now seems to have disappeared like snow in the sun.

4.3 Suggestions resulting in recommendations

As described in the previous sections, the community's perception prior to the construction of the wind farm was found to lean towards the level of psychological identification. However, through the conducted engagement methods, it turned out that the community's perception shifted negatively towards Vattenfall and its local operations in the Wieringermeer, resulting in a lower SLO. Therefore, this thesis's third and final sub-question deals with suggestions from residents as to what they consider would have led to better engagement regarding the Wieringermeer wind farm project. The central sub-question in this chapter reads: "*What recommendations can be drawn from local residents regarding their perception of engagement in the Wieringermeer wind farm project?*"

The interviews reveal that residents have very creative concepts to offer in engaging the local community regarding wind farm developments. For instance, one of the respondents indicated that it would have been a positive sign to invite the community to watch the installation of such a wind turbine. She described her suggestion as follows: "It was never said gosh, we're going to start now and who likes to come, can come and see. Then you can experience what's going on. This comes first, and then so comes the construction, and then the blades are attached, and then these vehicles are needed for it. Just to know the whole process of building a wind turbine. That would have been really nice. To get an idea of how much work it is." [...] How nice it would have been to invite citizens just to show them, look here is such a blade, this is the length of it. Then it would become more of your own. And now it is over there. It is never ours." [respondent 6]. The suggestion of inviting the community to watch the construction of such a wind turbine is conducive, as it contributes to the community's feeling that the wind farm being built is partly theirs. Such an invitation can positively influence the community's perception of the wind farm, contributing to a higher SLO.

Another resident referred to the lack of meaningful participation. This individual preferred that participation for residents would have been more effective. Although there is a presence of public participation, he indicated that little concrete is being done with citizens' ideas. As he describes it in his own words: "It is also important that when ideas come up that something is done with them. [...] Yes, and not that you embrace ideas very enthusiastically, so to speak, in such an initial phase and then do nothing with them. [...] In the first phase you get the idea that this walk-in and participation meeting makes sense, and then you think, I might as well not have attended, because nothing will happen anyway.

A waste of my time." Besides, the respondent mentioned that his ideas were neatly noted during this meeting. However, the next phase immediately involved the formal inspection of the plan. He has not been told why his ideas have not been implemented. He thereby suggests adjusting the rationale of such a participatory meeting. According to the Spectrum of the IAP2, residents' statements reveal that the information meeting at issue has a consultative approach in terms of public participation. In fact, the promise made to the community only features an "informative-approach" since little to nothing has been done with citizens' input. It demonstrates a low degree of shared authority for decision making within the participatory methods that have been conducted.

Moreover, the consequence of such participatory meetings is that residents' trust is considerably reduced. As they point out: they might as well not have gone because they will not achieve anything with it. Again, this negatively affects the community's perception of the company's acceptance and operations. The community gets the impression of having little to no influence on the wind farm operations, resulting in a lower SLO. As the respondent suggested, a different set-up allowing citizens to have more significant influence over the decisions made might have resulted in a community perception with more trust surrounding the company's activities.

5. Discussion

In this thesis, an attempt has been made to make a scholarly contribution to the concept of a SLO. This attempt has been made by exploring how public participation contributes to the construct of a SLO. However, there are some caveats I would like to point out.

This thesis is centered mainly upon my interpretation of how citizen anger arises due to a lack of meaningful public participation. However, not only the lack of meaningful public participation can explain the civic anger concerning the wind farm in its entirety. Within the wind farm case, more factors come into play to understand the complexity of civic anger. In the data collection process, it became apparent that besides the lack of meaningful public participation, the establishment of data centers in the area also serves a role in the development of anger among citizens. The generated electricity produced by the wind farm has in part been bought by Microsoft, which supplies power to its data center accordingly. The community has a perception that the generated power does not benefit the local residents but instead benefits a large-scale operator who, similar to the wind farm, has settled in the Wieringermeer. Although this development undoubtedly plays a role in obtaining a social license to operate, the respective development has not been appointed in the context of this thesis. Two reasons underlie this. First, this development did not fit within the scope of the thesis. Throughout the case study, the main focus was to examine how public participation contributed to obtaining or diminishing a social license to operate. That said, the emergence of data centers in the Wieringermeer area is separated from this. Second, I argue that the perception of residents regarding the arrival of a data center and its subsequent citizen anger is a study that can and possibly should be conducted on its own. With this observation, I would like to nuance my analysis regarding the level at which citizens appear within the SLO model of Thomson & Boutilier (2011). While within this case study, public participation and the conducted engagement methods influenced residents' perceptions regarding the activities of the wind farm initiators, it should be taken into account that the appearance of the data centers may have influenced residents' perceptions regarding the wind farm as well.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis, an attempt has been made to find an answer to the central question, which reads: "*What is the perception of residents around the planning and construction of the Wieringermeer wind farm concerning public participation, and what role does that perception play in whether or not obtaining and retaining a SLO?*" The thesis aimed to examine how citizen participation contributes to obtaining a SLO.

The results from chapter 4 show that a SLO was already in existence for the wind farm operators prior to the planning and construction process. There was a positive community perception towards the generation of wind energy. It was notable that the operators could afford to conduct activities without resistance from residents during this stage.

However, several factors caused residents' perceptions to change negatively, resulting in a SLO that can be considered negligible. First of all, the conducted engagement methods did not deliver the desired result that was aimed for beforehand. For example, the neighborhood regulation feels like a slim consolation to residents. Besides, it only applies to a small number of households. Additionally, the Wind fund method has a construction where residents have little influence on the funds. This construction also influenced the way residents' perceptions gradually changed towards the wind farm. Lastly, the Poldermolen concerns an initiative that was never realized. The community considers this project as a promise that has once again been broken.

Besides the engagement methods, several information meetings had been organized for residents allowing them to have a say in the plans. Nonetheless, the participatory methods discussed in the results appeared to have a low level of shared decision authority. Thus, the design of the participatory methods resulted in a negative shift in perception among residents. Residents experienced that they apparently had less influence on decisions than was proposed beforehand. All in all, the design and implementation of the engagement methods along with the participatory methods appears to have caused the pre-existing SLO of the wind farm to fade away gradually.

As a final note, I would like to place the case study in a greater perspective in order to contribute to the theory regarding a SLO. As addressed within the theoretical framework, Jijelava & Vanclay (2017) do not adequately address how the barrier of legal legitimacy contributes to a community's perception in obtaining a basic SLO. Therefore, based on this thesis, I would like to extend the concept of legal legitimacy. While this case study does not demonstrate how legal legitimacy contributes to obtaining a basic SLO, it does show how the lack of legal legitimacy, as a result of improperly implemented engagement and participation methods, contributes to the withdrawal of a SLO. Thus, the concept of legal legitimacy, besides economic and social legitimacy, should be seen as a requirement to obtain a basic SLO.

7. References

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8. Appendices

Appendix I: Respondents

			Date	Duration	Medium
Respondent 1	Project Director Municipality Hollands Kroon	Anonymous	29-10-2021	26:44	Microsoft Teams
Respondent 2	Resident	Monique Konrad	05-11-2021	34:15	Offline
Respondent 3	Resident	Dirk de Vries	15-11-2021	57:05	Offline
Respondent 4	Resident	Mijneke ter Haar	20-11-2021	52:34	Offline
Respondent 5	Resident	Rob Buursink	20-11-2021	52:34	Offline
Respondent 6	Resident	Agatha Boon Koeleman	26-11-2021	67:23	Offline

Appendix II: Facebook post

Beste leden van Toekomst Wieringermeer,

Namens de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen voer ik op dit moment een scriptieonderzoek uit met betrekking tot de burgerbetrokkenheid bij de totstandkoming van het Windpark Wieringermeer.

Tijdens het onderzoek wordt gekeken in hoeverre de lokale bevolking betrokken is geweest rondom de ontwikkeling van het windmolenproject. Om tot een beter beeld te komen rondom de publieke inspraak van de inwoners in het gebied, voer ik interviews uit met betrokkenen.

Om die reden plaats ik in deze groep een oproep. Ik vroeg me af of ik via deze groep met mensen in contact kan komen en een aantal vragen kan stellen rondom de ontwikkeling van het windpark en de betrokkenheid van burgers binnen dit proces. De interviews in kwestie nemen ongeveer 30-45 minuten in beslag. De gegeven informatie wordt enkel gebruikt voor dit onderzoek.

Graag verneem ik of er leden in deze groep zijn die openstaan voor een gesprek hierover. Bij interesse kun je me een privébericht versturen. Mijn dank is groot!

Met vriendelijke groet,

Kristian Kuut,
Student Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

Appendix III: Consent form

Overeenkomst van deelname

Onderzoeksproject: Bachelor scriptie Sociale Geografie & Planologie

Universiteit: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

Titel: “Public participation in wind farm projects: The case study of the Wieringermeer wind farm”

Het doel van het onderzoek is om inzicht te krijgen in het effect van publieke participatie binnen windmolenparkprojecten en de acceptatie hiervan.

Geachte heer/ mevrouw,

Bedankt dat u mij wilt helpen met mijn onderzoek naar het effect van publieke participatie binnen windmolenparkprojecten en de acceptatie hiervan, in het bijzonder windmolenpark Wieringermeer. Met deze brief informeer ik u over het verloop van het interview.

Het gesprek zal circa 30 minuten duren. U kunt op ieder moment aangeven te willen stoppen, of een vraag niet te willen beantwoorden. Het interview kan door de open structuur ook uitlopen wanneer u extra toelichting wenst te geven.

Het interview zal worden opgenomen met een audiorecorder en vervolgens worden getranscribeerd. U heeft de mogelijkheid het transcript te controleren en waar nodig aan te passen op feitelijke onjuistheden. Het transcript zal worden gebruikt om de informatie uit het interview nader te analyseren, om zo de onderzoeksvraag te kunnen beantwoorden. Het audiobestand zal verwijderd worden wanneer het onderzoek is afgerond. De gegevens die tijdens het interview worden verzameld zullen vertrouwelijk worden behandeld. De gegevens, evenals het transcript, zullen worden gedeeld met mijn begeleider dr. Philippe Hanna. Daarnaast zal de scriptie worden opgenomen in het archief van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Het transcript zal niet in de scriptie worden opgenomen. U heeft de mogelijkheid anoniem te blijven indien u dit wenselijk acht.

Met het ondertekenen van deze overeenkomst verklaar ik dat:

- Het mij duidelijk is waar dit onderzoek over gaat.
- Ik begrijp dat deelname aan dit onderzoek vrijwillig is en ik het recht heb om individuele vragen niet te beantwoorden.
- Ik begrijp dat mijn deelname aan het onderzoek vertrouwelijk is en dat, zonder mijn schriftelijk bezwaar hiertegen, materiaal (algemeen of in de vorm van quotes) in de rapportage kan worden gebruikt.
- Ik begrijp dat alle informatie die wordt verkregen vertrouwelijk zal worden bewaard, zij het op een met wachtwoord beveiligde computer of bestand.
- Ik begrijp dat de data die voortkomt uit het interview gebruikt kan worden in artikelen, hoofdstukken van boeken, gepubliceerd en ongepubliceerd werk en in presentaties.
- Ik begrijp dat ik na afloop van het interview mijn antwoorden slechts kan aanpassen op feitelijke onjuistheden.

Voor verdere vragen kunt u contact opnemen met:

Kristian Kuut (student)
k.kuut@student.rug.nl

en

dr. Philippe Hanna (begeleider)
p.hanna@rug.nl

Wanneer u akkoord gaat met bovenstaande, graag invullen:

Ik geef toestemming tot het opnemen van het interview voor verwerkings- en coderingsdoeleinden JA / NEE

Ik wens anoniem te blijven binnen dit onderzoek JA / NEE

Wanneer NEE:

Mijn voornaam kan worden gebruikt binnen dit onderzoek JA / NEE

Wanneer JA:

Er kan een pseudoniem naar mijn keuze worden gebruikt (Bijvoorbeeld: 'respondent *nummer*') JA / NEE

Naam deelnemer interview

Datum.....

Email.....
(indien u wenst een transcript van dit interview te ontvangen om te checken op feitelijke onjuistheden)

Handtekening.....