

Variations in landscape sensitivity towards wind energy in Belgium

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For many decades opponents to wind energy have focused on the landscape intrusion as one of the strongest argument (Wolsink, 2007).

The Lacsawep research project aimed to analyse and assess the landscape capacity and social attitudes towards wind energy parks in Belgium (Van Rompaey et al., 2009)

Among other it assessed how people react towards wind farms in rural and semi-rural landscapes.

Belgium is situated at the language and cultural border between germanic (Dutch and German) and romanic languages (French), in Western Europe, one of the most densely populated area of the world. Flanders – the Dutch-speaking part - is far more urbanized (460 people per km²) than Wallonia – the French-speaking part (207 people per km²). Hence some differences in sensitivity towards landscapes could be expected, as it was noticed in a comparison between French and Dutch situations (Buijs et al., 2006). Contrary to other people, Belgians seem to have few sensitivity towards landscape, especially in the French-speaking part.

A photo-questionnaire survey has been conducted among 1500 Belgians according to the sharing of Belgian people (about 1000 Flemings and 500 Walloons). This survey method allows to reach a broad public. People had to mark various rural landscapes (with or without wind farms) on a likert-scale according to their scenic attractiveness.

Landscape sensitivity varies in Belgium. Flemings scored more positively towards rural landscapes than Walloons who used more often the lower item of the scale. Flemings are also more sensitive to wind farms in the landscape. Of course cultural differences between both communities could explain it. But other parameters have also been tested : urbanization rate, gender, level of education... Separately all those parameters are significative. The paper analyses how they are linked together and wich one influence the most the landscape sensitivity of Belgians. In other words, can we predict people attitude towards landscape and wind energy through their profile?

References

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