

Public engagement with offshore renewable energy (wind, tidal and wave) Bouke Wiersma (University of Exeter)

This 3-year PhD project (2012-2015) is jointly sponsored by the States of Guernsey Government and the UK Economic and Social Research Council. The PhD researches the meanings and values associated with Guernsey’s coastal and sea areas and with specific forms of offshore renewables (wind, tidal and wave) in order to assess which technologies might be more or less publicly acceptable in various locations. The first output of the PhD is a review of research on public engagement with offshore renewable energy, published in a prestigious academic journal, and available on the Guernsey Renewable Energy Team website (<http://www.guernseyrenewableenergy.com/news/article.aspx?newsid=69>). In addition, this document summarises the first of this PhD’s three empirical studies.

Study 1 employed a novel qualitative research method combining in-depth interviews and photographs of Guernsey coastal places taken by participants. 28 individuals took part, recruited on the basis of diversity in terms of age, gender, socio-economic status, location of residence, birthplace and use of the sea. This produced a substantial new dataset comprising 27 hours of interviews and 200 photographs (Output 2). The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed, along with the photographs.

Key Findings:

Place: Guernsey was viewed as a great place to live, beautiful, scenic and distinctive from other Channel Islands, France and the UK. In an island described as crowded and small, coastal and sea areas were perceived to provide openness and escape. Virtually the whole coastline of Guernsey was valued – few coastal areas were not represented in the photographs (see Figure 1). People born on the island seemed to especially value coastal places that were widely distributed around the island. Guernsey was also associated with dependence, for example imports of food, as well as a larger economic dependence upon the financial sector



Figure 1 - Map of where photographs were taken – each marker represents the location of one photo

Technology: Participants were most aware of wind turbines and least aware of wave energy technologies, which tended to be mixed up with tidal energy. Wind energy was perceived to be controversial and preferred less than tidal. Tidal was very positively regarded, and the magnitude of the local resource was regarded as globally unique. Offshore energy was associated with wider energy system aspects, including dependence upon the cable to Jersey/France, the Vale power station, the need for better building insulation and micro-generation.

Place x Technology: Tidal energy was supported because it was perceived to reduce Guernsey’s dependence on imported electricity and harness a unique, locally available resource. Offshore wind was more supported than onshore, due to the perceived crowdedness of the island. Certain offshore areas were deemed more appropriate for wind turbines (the North/off Chouet and the South West) in comparison to others (East and South coasts) (see Figure 2).

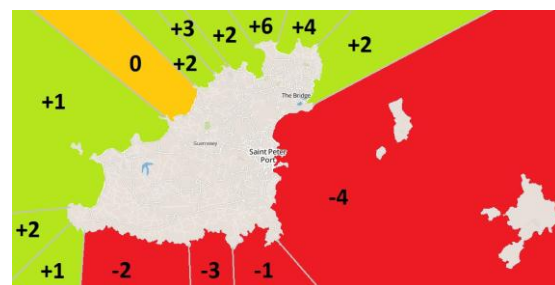


Figure 2- Map of areas perceived more (green) or less (red) appropriate for siting offshore wind energy

Next Steps: A series of focus groups was conducted in June 2014 in which factual information about offshore renewable energy (available resources, technology options, feasible locations and costs) was provided to participants to inform their discussions about Guernsey’s energy future. Results will be forthcoming. Following this, a large-scale quantitative survey with a representative sample will be conducted in December 2014.

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