When participation is contested: lessons from the opposition to gas shale industry in Québec (Canada) for the understanding of social acceptability

Marie-José Fortin
Yann Fournis
Canada’s Research Chair in Regional and Territorial Development
GRIDEQ / CRDT / UQAR

IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN THE DIGITAL ERA
35th Annual Conference of the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA)
Florence, Italy, April 22th 2015
Social acceptability: changes in scientific papers (wind energy)

1. From the “not in my backyard” (NIMBY) syndrome towards more constructivist approaches;

2. From an individual perspective towards interaction models, with multiplicity of stake holders and scales in the articulation of energy projects;

3. From «social» as obstacles, irrational public, resisting agents toward social actors with their own logics and capacities;

4. From “acceptance” as an individual, passive and even fixed attitude, to «social acceptability» as a collective process that could lead projects to evolve and take different paths.
Proposal: three levels of processes

Distinct processes, associated with varied temporalities and forms of regulation: toward a relative convergence?


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>microsocial level</th>
<th>Process of social interpretation and the creation of meaning by individuals / collective regarding an activity / project / policy and changes they bring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mesopolitical level</td>
<td>Process of deliberation and the formation of compromise, legitimated decisions and rules which reconciles different strategies and grand conflicts in institutional arrangements..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>macroeconomic level</td>
<td>Process of building large social compromises that nourishes development model and that structures economies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Bélanger et Lévesque (1992)
Définition: social acceptability is a «political evaluation process of a sociotechnical project involving a plurality of stakeholders involved at different levels who increasingly reach agreements and institutional rules deemed to be legitimate, as they are coherent with both the vision of the territory and the development model favored by the affected people.» Fournis et Fortin (2013: 13)

A complex process:
- Inherent tensions, conflicts
- Power relationships… often asymmetric
- Explicit decision making process

Energy context

Quebec’s historical choices: a political perspective
- Public company: Hydro-Quebec, among largest world producer
- Mega projects: installed capacity of 40 000 MW (98% hydro)
Context

Actual policy reaffirms: energy and economy

- 2th objective: "We must make better use of energy as a lever for economic development. Priority is given to hydroelectricity, wind energy potential, hydrocarbon, reserves and the diversification of our natural gas supplies."

Quebec Energy Strategy 2006-2014
(summary: 9, underlined)
Shale gas in Québec: A controversial energy

- «fracking revolution» in US, energetic autonomy not the rational
- Utica shale formation = new potentiel for energy resource
- A build resource ... initial conditions
- Resource based economy in Quebec: a favorable a priori by government
- Regulation by old mining regimes (1864): land private / underneath public property
- 462 exclusives permits («claims») delivered to 26 companies

Map of permits allocated for petroleum and natural gas in the Saint-Lawrence valley

Source: BAPE (2011: 41)
Citizen’ mobilization starting point

- 29 wells, 18 with hydraulic fracturing technology
- Questions and concerns
- Creation of «Local watchful committees»
- Dilemma for communities
- 78 local watchful committees (2013);
- mainly in the target area
- what factors help / constraint the mobilization?
Participation through strong instruments

- Refuse to play by the rules = refusal to participate??
Participation: official, not directly related & informel

- First drills (2006)
- Regulation by Land authority (CPTAQ)
- Information meetings by APGQ
- Public hearings by public office (BAPE)
- Environmental strategic assessment, consultation
- Public hearings by public office (BAPE)

**Companies / Industry**
- permis
- Entente cadre
- Règlement de St-Bonaventure
- Missions en Pennsylvanie
- Campagne pas «chez-nous»

**Local elected representatives**
- Rencontres d'information
- Coord. municipaux inter-rég.
- CPTAQ

**Local watchful committees (farmers-citizens)**
- Représentants région.
- Table énergie.
- Mission en Pennsylvanie
- Commission agric., pêches, énergie

**Union’ farmers (UPA)**
Discrete entry of industry and hopes of informed people
1. Brokerage, actor constitution and rising of collective action
2. Mobilization of information & knowledge via social networks
3. Framing and coalition formation with elected representatives
4. Scale shift and radicalization: towards a regional movement (NIABY)
5. Boundary and identity shift of the movement in two parts
Refusal («non-acceptation») is not settled at first stage, neither once and for ever

Evolving framing: from well as potentiel resource for local community to megaproject as a threat (if in commercial exploitation)

Not only cognitive reasons :
  ▪ Role and capacities of authorities (Central State)
  ▪ Decision making process
  ▪ Dominance of a sectorial perspective
  ▪ Information and Knowledge : accessible, independant
  ▪ Recognition of territorial dynamics
  ▪ Uncertainty
Conclusion

- Purpose of participation: build strong & legitimate decisions
- Refusal should also be as an option...
- Social acceptance as a build pathway
- Capacities to connect different processes, related to varied scales and times?
- From top-down approach to the time of communities?
Thank you!

To know more:
- marie-jose_fortin@uqar.ca
- yann_fournis@uqar.ca
- www.uqar.ca/developpement-territorial