

## GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT



The report on guidelines for public engagement deals with the topics of why public engagement is important in geothermal energy projects, why a comprehensive planning of participation measures is crucial, and in this regard how a constructive communication strategy can serve risk and conflict prevention.

**The development of geothermal energy or renewable energies in general is not just a technical matter.** It is also very much a question of social change with impact on people's everyday lives regarding energy production, distribution and consumption. The importance of including the public in development and installation of new energy infrastructures has been increasingly recognized over the last years.

### What does public engagement involve?

The involvement of the public starts with information. Information is the base for any further level of participation and should therefore be carefully and continuously pursued. It is an essential prerequisite for **consultation**, where opinions are exchanged between involving persons or institutions. Next to that, the process of **cooperation** is to mention, where recommendations for the further course of the project should be drawn up for instance at a round table from as many different perspectives as possible. Even if the participation process is designed to be as open-ended as possible, there are limits to what can be negotiated. These limits usually lie in the technical planning and the target direction of the planned geothermal plant. Next to **co-decisions** in planning, public engagement also involves **financial participation opportunities**.

### Why is public engagement important?

First and foremost, because environmentalism and decarbonization do not work without the support of the public, but specifically for the particular project – because it plays an **important role for the successful implementation** of it, for instance by establishing acceptance, which is based on a rather complex and non-linear interaction of knowledge, experiences and other psychological factors (such as trust, perceived fairness, perceived behavioral control, norms and attitudes). Public engagement also targets the right to fairly participate in processes that affects an individual's own life.

### Planning public engagement

#### *Analysis of the context*

When planning public engagement, not the instrument itself is the most important determiner for success, but rather the analysis of the context of the system, into which there is planned to integrate a certain technology or with whom there is the desire to jointly develop a certain technological solution. The analysis should be conducted before choosing the instrument for public engagement. It can involve factors like the place, meaning it should be brought into experience whether there are protected spaces, nature reserves, national parks or whether there exist directives protecting flora and fauna, whether the project would affect the landscape negatively and what consequences would result out of this circumstance. It can be relevant to understand how the residents are attached to an area in order to act appropriately.

#### *Information about the community and stakeholders*

Furthermore, **information about the community** is crucial for planning public engagement. It is important to know the groups of people and the stakeholders that need to be represented in the engagement process of a geothermal energy project, what the socio-demographic characteristics of a community are, as well as which political attitudes are dominant in the area. When assessing the community the stakeholders that are of relevance should be considered. Examples for relevant stakeholders are the **public, federations, educational institutions, the media, potential users of energy, landowners, insurance companies**, etc. (Figure 1).





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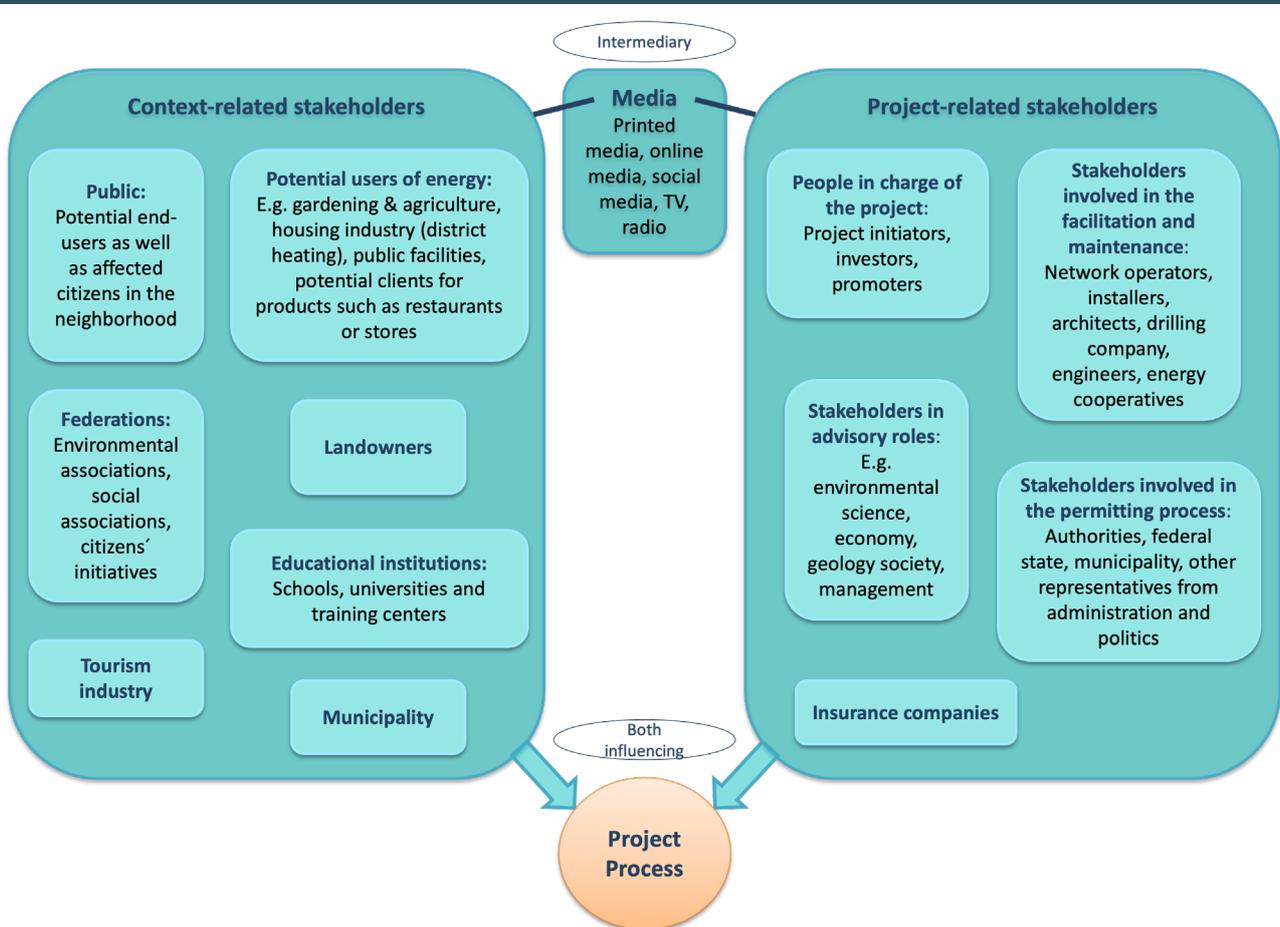


Figure 1: Overview of potential stakeholders in geothermal projects.

### Methods preparing public engagement

Identifying the relevant stakeholders and their relation to each other is essential when tailoring the different participation measures to the existing target groups. Therefore, stakeholder maps provide a good overview. Furthermore, it should be researched whether there:

- were any events in the history of the area that could influence the residents' reactions towards following energy projects,
- already exist specific visions in terms of energy solutions, which is closely connected to the political context, which should also be taken into account.

What should also be taken into account is that citizens' knowledge about geothermal energy or energy topics in general determines how the engagement strategies are designed.

Next to the already mentioned stakeholder map, other methods preparing public engagement involve literature research, media analyses, interviews and surveys. Especially for interviews and surveys an important recommendation is to apply them at a later point in time after the picture about the conditions is clearer. No participation measure is trivial. Even the smallest opinion poll is an intervention that sets information and has an effect on the people that might be unwanted to a point in time when it still needs to be figured out how to communicate and let people participate.





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### Concrete goal for engagement activities

As important as the contextual analysis is to concretize the goal of the planned engagement process. In order to avoid creating false expectations, setting realistic and clear goals is the key: Examples for what can be considered for this step is whether acceptance needs to be achieved or conflicts be reduced, whether citizens should be activated for the project and further climate protection actions, or whether financial participation should be encouraged. One crucial factor that determines the realism of a public participations' goal is **what resources are available for the process**. Public participation processes are not free and require time, personnel and money resources. It is important for the initiators to figure in advance who has enough **expertise** in dealing with different stakeholders and who boasts good communication skills and to determine how participation and financing should be organized. One possible way to structure the project's time line is to distinguish between the project definition, the exploration, the drilling, the construction, the operation and the decommissioning and post-closure phase.

### Overview of Project Phases (Task 3.2)

#### Social dimensions



Figure 2: Overview of project phases for the social dimension.

The project phases are not insignificant since **participation measures can only make their impact when they are used in a suited situation**. This leads to the circumstance that some measures work for one project, but not for another. Thus, another question for planning public engagement is "when does which instrument make sense"?





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### Risk and conflict communication

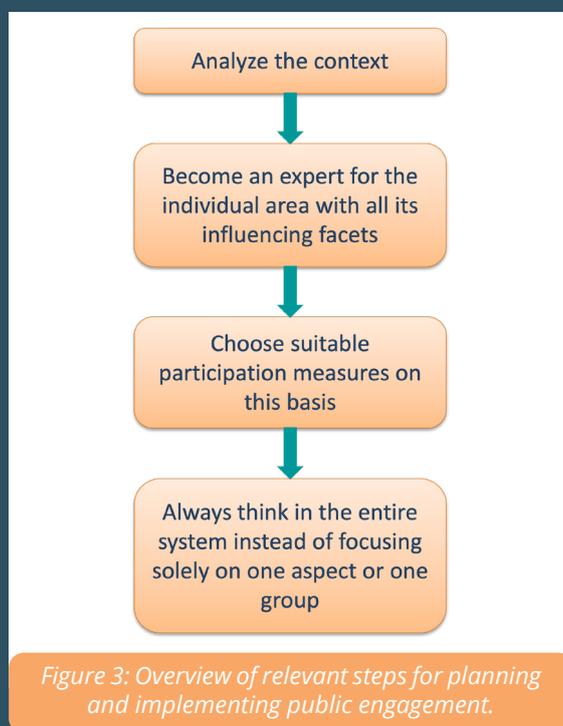
When addressing the topic of public engagement, communication regarding risk and conflict prevention can also be mentioned. An adequate communication of the risks within the framework of public participation in planning and implementing the project and a communication strategy in case a risk scenario actually occurs count as two general strategies for this field. Possible conflict topics reach from:

- an unequal distribution of advantages and disadvantages,
- to a conflict that stems from different preferences and values, social and/or political conflicts,
- up until different interpretations of the level of knowledge that then cause specific conflicts.

Depending on the source of the conflict, there are different resolution-strategies possible. In some cases it is important to focus on the emotional level, in others it is needed to reduce uncertainty or increase knowledge and sometimes it is crucial to provide more possibilities for co-decisions.

### Conclusion

To sum up, participation is a must for the realization of renewable energy projects. It is regulated through legal frameworks for the case of formal participation, but beyond that there are also important informal participation and communication measures that have proved to be crucial for the success of a project all along the line. An overall recommendation could be to analyze the context in order to become an expert for the individual area with all its influencing facets, then choosing suitable participation measures on the retrieved information and remembering to always think in the entire system instead of focusing solely on one aspect or one group.



### More information:

CROWD THERMAL Deliverable 1.4 [Guidelines for public engagement](#)



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