The Potential of Narratives

A study of two wind energy projects in Germany

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Main field of study – Leadership and Organisation
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Abstract

Wind energy projects in Germany increasingly struggle to attain local acceptance, therefore, the German energy transition towards renewables is challenged. Research has shown that trust and measures of distributive and procedural justice, especially the information conveyed in wind energy projects, are necessary components to gain community acceptance. At the same time, narratives have been shown to have a positive impact on stakeholder engagement. This research aims to investigate the (elements of) information conveyed in wind energy projects as well as the potentials of and considerations for narratives used in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects in relation to stakeholders’ acceptance of such projects. Based on a review of the literature on social acceptance in wind energy and on narratives (in stakeholder engagement), semi-structured interviews with stakeholders of two different wind energy projects in Germany were conducted. Part of the gathered data was used to identify relevant (elements of) information conveyed in stakeholder engagement in the aforementioned wind energy projects. Then such information further were used to complement findings from the literature resulting in a comprehensive list of information. Moreover, the other part was analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis to understand respondents’ perceptions of narratives in the given context. This revealed examples and potentials of as well as considerations for narratives used in this context (e.g., (un-)suitability of content for narratives, the use of simple and understandable language fitting the target-audience). The results indicate that narratives offer the potentials to reunite divided communities, foster interaction and disseminate information more effectively thereby contributing to change a prevailing mood that is potentially characterized by distrust, fear, envy and rejection. These findings extend the existing literature on attaining local social/community acceptance as well as conducting effective stakeholder engagement. At the same time, they may serve as guidance for practitioners working in this context.

Keywords: wind energy, social acceptance, community acceptance, procedural justice, information in wind energy projects, narratives, narratives in stakeholder engagement, narratives in planning processes, narratives in dialogue
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1. Introduction - The importance of energy for sustainable development

Considering the energy transition towards renewable energy production as a crucial element of sustainable development, this thesis aims to portray the potential of using narratives in wind energy development projects. More specifically it aims to investigate their impact on acceptance of the local community - a driving factor limiting, or even hindering, the development of wind energy projects - and the perceptions of individual stakeholders towards narratives as occurred in the two examined wind energy projects in Germany.

Sustainable development, a term coined by the Brundtland Commission in its report *Our Common Future*, published in 1987, aims to secure intergenerational equity through a holistic consideration of economic, social and environmental factors (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Yet, past and current practices in the global economic context prove a widespread unsustainable usage of natural, finite resources resulting in environmental degradation (Huemann & Silvius, 2017). Meanwhile, the consumption of energy on a global level is spurred by a growing middle class in Asia and general affluence in developed countries (Seale & Solano, 2012). This leads to increased dependency on and demand for energy coming from conventional and finite energy sources like coal, oil and natural gas albeit a decrease in accessibility of efficient extraction and production which is traditionally dominated by large conglomerates and incumbents. Increasing levels of such burned fossil fuels, in turn, cause environmental degradation, health problems as well as pollution through CO2 emissions to grow even more (Klagge & Meister, 2018; Petrova, 2013).

In order to advance the status quo and challenge the hegemony of incumbent firms, governments, the private sector itself and a more engaged, socially responsible as well as entrepreneurial-driven society play a critical role (Klagge & Meister, 2018; Senge, Hamilton & Kania, 2015). This applies to the general economic development and the energy sector alike. To further guide practices and operations concerning their contributions as well as harm towards a sustainable development as outlined by the Brundtland report, the United Nations have introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. The production of affordable and clean energy is expressed in SDG 7 stating to “ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy” (United Nations, 2020). Due to its interlinked nature with other SDGs and particularly its fundamental character of delivering the (energy) source for overcoming challenges and realizing opportunities in the world, energy obtains a crucial role within sustainable development: “Be it for jobs, security, climate change, food production or increasing incomes, access to energy for all is essential.” (United Nations, 2020). Thus, next to increased energy efficiency as well as guidelines and recommendations for reduced energy consumption in general, the use and increased production of renewable energy is a crucial element to ensure sustainable development (United Nations, 2020).

1.1 Background - The German energy transition

In Germany, the government passed the renewable energy law (EEG) already in the year 2000, promoting the production of energy from renewable sources while guaranteeing fixed tariffs for the feed-in of renewable energy into the national grid. This is often perceived as the start of the German energy transition (“Energiewende”), favouring an alternative, sustainable supply of energy different from the established “monopolistic utility companies” (Klagge & Meister, 2018). Since then, the number of renewable energy sources in Germany increased and production has grown from 6% in 2000 to 42% in 2019 (Stratmann, 2020) of the total energy production. In the first quarter of 2020 renewable energy was even able to supply more than half (52%) of the energy demand in Germany to which wind energy
(on- and off-shore) contributed more than 55%. However, the maintenance and future extension of wind energy (specifically onshore wind energy) in Germany is experiencing a drastic slow-down due to subsidies running out, changed legislation and increasing difficulties in attaining local acceptance of affected communities (Flauger & Witsch, 2020). This jeopardises the successful energy transition in Germany and the government’s ambition to produce 65% of the total energy with renewables until 2030 (Klätke & Meister, 2018; ZSW, 2020).

Research has shown that the general acceptance of further deployment and usage of wind energy in Germany is high (82%) (Fachagentur Windenergie an Land, 2019). However, in many cases local opposition seems to emerge more often, hindering or slowing down the further extension of wind energy sites (Reusswig et al., 2016; Ruddat & Sonnberger, 2019) and thus negatively influences the endeavour to meet climate change and sustainable development targets (Ellis & Ferraro, 2016).

Despite many positive facts from a technical perspective – e.g. carbon-free energy production with low to none by-products, generally uncomplicated installation on various terrain and its reliable and profitable operations – wind power turbines are always visible because of their properties and conditions (Pasqualetti, 2011). Also, they inherently alter the landscape and leave visual impact. Measures to reduce conspicuity, like sleeker designs, painted poles or demand-controlled night light emission, have been introduced to ease opposition but are not catering everyone’s individually perceived demands (Dirkshof, 2020; Pasqualetti, 2011).

Local public opposition to wind energy development projects is visible globally and reaches back several decades in academic literature. Research in this field was substantially initiated by Carlman in 1984 who determined social acceptance for wind energy to be more than general public opinion. She suggested several constraints such as the political and regulatory process of siting wind turbines influencing social acceptance (Carlman, 1984 in Wüstenhagen, Wolsink & Bürer et al., 2007). A profound number of researchers has since considered the reasons for potential local opposition and factors influencing social acceptance (e.g. Wüstenhagen et al., 2007; Gros, 2007; Pasqualetti, 2011; Petrova, 2013; Langer, Decker, Roosen & Menrad, 2016; Simcock, 2016; Reusswig et al., 2016; Scherhaufer, Höltiger, Salak, Schauppenlehner, & Schmidt, 2017; Ruddat & Sonnberger, 2019).

1.1 Social acceptance of renewable energy

Generally, social acceptance in the context of renewable energy encompasses three dimensions which were first conceptualized by Wüstenhagen et al. (2007): socio-political, market and community acceptance. This model served as a guiding reference for academic research, specifically in connection to literature on wind energy. The three key dimensions will be further explored within the theoretical framework of this thesis (see chapter 2.1) with an emphasis on the local/community acceptance which describes the acceptance within the locally affected community towards a specific project (Wüstenhagen et al., 2007). In there, the meaning of justice takes a prominent role and is presented as procedural and distributive justice. On the one hand, distributive justice refers to the fair distribution of a project’s outcomes – positive and negative – between stakeholders. Procedural justice, on the other hand, describes the fairness of the entire process and its decisions that are based on "rights of participation, access to information, and lack of bias on the part of the decision-maker" (Gross, 2007, p. 2729).

As a result of a literature review on social acceptance of wind energy, the authors Langer et al. (2016) present a collection of numerous factors influencing social acceptance categorized into personal characteristics, perceived side effects, technological and geographical issues to process-related variables. This collection - as well as other contributions to the topic - paints a profound and multifaceted picture of the complexity accompanying social acceptance in wind energy projects as
discussed in recent academic literature (Langer et al., 2016; Ellis & Ferraro, 2016; Scherhauder et al., 2017).

Similar to what other authors investigating the field of social acceptance in wind energy projects have proclaimed (e.g. Gros, 2007; Simcock, 2016; Reusswig et al., 2016; Scherhauder et al., 2017; Rudder & Sonnberger, 2019), the authors Langer et al. (2016, p. 253) identify “information quality and quantity” to be an important and central element to be provided and passed on in the process of communicating and engaging with local stakeholders (Dütschke, Schneider & Wesche 2017). Information is expressed as one element in procedural justice (Gross, 2007; Wüstenhagen et al., 2007; Simcock, 2016; Scherhauder et al., 2017). However, as also addressed by Simcock (2016 based on Walker, 2012), the reviewed literature does not seem to be universally aligned nor does it provide a coherent collection of which characters and elements of information are relevant due to varying levels of accuracy.

Especially, privately led wind energy development projects lacking proper community engagement have experienced high rates of resistance (Gross, 2007; Reusswig et al., 2016; Wüstenhagen et al., 2007). A promising approach, yielding higher rates of acceptance is found in more extensive cooperation in wind energy projects – be it in energy cooperatives or cross-sector collaborations between municipal, private and public actors (Klagger & Meister, 2018). Arguably, that is due to a higher level of stakeholder engagement (Scherhauder et al., 2017; Simcock, 2016), encompassing identification, assessment and involvement in decision making processes of stakeholders (Eskerod & Huemann, 2013; Silvieris & Schipper, 2019).

The traditional, conglomerate-led energy sector includes an unbalanced dispersion of negative impacts towards affected communities as well as of power in regard to decision-making and financial interests. In energy projects working more cooperatively, as mentioned above, citizens from the local community are involved in energy production and distribution (Klagger & Meister, 2018). They allow decentralised energy production and spur alternative “forms of organisation[s] that accentuate principles of collective control, participative decision-making, and a fair distribution of benefits” (Becker & Nauman, 2017, p. 2).

Instead of being pure consumers of energy, citizens and/or communities obtain a changed role by either producing and directly feeding energy into the national grid, or by producing and immediately consuming the energy in one’s own household leading to the term prosumer. Oppermann and Renn (2019) describe these roles as energy-transition-entrepreneurs that engage within energy cooperatives by holding shares. The active participation in expanding and shaping the energy transition not only increases the acceptance of such infrastructural measures but also changes the perception from ‘to be involved’ as a stakeholder into ‘indeed involved’.

One very common form of producing energy in a decentralised and more collaborative way in Germany are energy cooperatives (Schreuer & Weismeier, 2010). Already in the first half of the 20th century energy cooperatives contributed to the electrification of rural areas (Yildiz et al., 2015). In the 1990s pioneer renewable energy projects in form of cooperatives started emerging and were boosted by the EEG (renewable energy law) in 2000 (Bauwens, Gotchev & Holstenkamp, 2016). This organisational form of the cooperative for energy production subsequently surged throughout the late 2000s (Yildiz et al., 2015). At the same time traditional wind energy companies have started to engage in more extensive cooperation with affected communities to increase acceptance of new wind energy projects (Klagger & Meister, 2018).
1.1.2 Narratives in stakeholder engagement

Another literature stream, that has, until today, not been connected to wind energy projects is the use of narratives in stakeholder engagement. Ever since the ancient Greeks a large construct called rhetoric has been developed to investigate and refine the art of storytelling to persuade – as will be discussed in further detail in section 2.3 Narratives and stakeholder engagement – Origin, explanation and relation. Recently, a growing number of researchers have investigated the role of narratives and storytelling when stakeholder engagement in design and planning processes is carried out, for example using societal capacity to meet governance challenges (Miller, O’Leary, Graffy, & Stechel, 2015) or creating a land-use plan (Quick, 2018). Also, Sandercock (2003) mentions using storytelling in policy, process, pedagogy, critique, as a foundation and as a catalyst for change. Simultaneously, recent research has investigated the advantages of weaving together facts and subjective elements (e.g. emotions, values, assumptions) into stories and their positive effects in stakeholder engagement (Sundin, Andersson & Watt, 2018).

As will be discussed in further detail in the theoretical framework (section 2.3), narratives always contain content. In light of the information transmission in wind energy projects that has been deemed important through its contribution to procedural justice in stakeholder engagement (Gross, 2007; Scherhaufer et al., 2017; Simcock, 2016), it is still unknown how narratives are used and which elements of information they potentially contain as (part of) their content. In order to make use of narratives as a tool to increase acceptance among stakeholders in wind energy projects more research is necessary to investigate above mentioned uncertainties.

1.2 Research problem

For wind energy projects in Germany it is crucial to attain local acceptance in order to extend the deployment of wind turbines and therefore contribute to the German energy transition as well as sustainable development in general.

An essential part of the stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects is the communication of information about the project and its consequences. In academic literature, authors agree on the importance of information shared among stakeholders of wind energy projects to increase acceptance. However, as also addressed by Simcock (2016 based on Walker, 2012), the selection and character of necessary information lack coherence and vary in levels of accuracy i.e. there is no comprehensive list indicating which (elements of) information should be communicated in wind energy projects.

Furthermore, there is academic literature portraying the benefits of the use of narratives in stakeholder engagement. However, current research on wind energy projects does not examine if such information (or part of it) is conveyed through narratives and how these narratives relate to increasing acceptance among local stakeholders of wind energy projects. Neither does current literature explore which potentials the use of narratives in stakeholder engagement occurring in wind energy projects bear and what considerations should be thought about when incorporating narratives in stakeholder engagement of such projects.

1.3 Aim

The aim of this thesis is two-fold: to investigate information conveyed in wind energy projects and to analyse narratives in such context. Regarding the first aim, the goal is to compile a list of elements of information conveyed in the stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects based on academic literature and to complement this list with case-specific information from two wind energy projects in Germany. In addition, the stakeholders’ perceptions on the importance of such information shall be investigated. Regarding the second aim of this thesis, the ambition is to explore the general potentials
of and considerations for narratives in this context. Furthermore, it is considered to be of interest to investigate which content (possibly relating to the found elements of information) is transported via narratives and how these narratives are used (or not) in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects in Germany, potentially impacting local stakeholders’ acceptance. The authors acknowledge that information is not the sole factor contributing to increasing acceptance for such projects. Nevertheless, information is an integral part of distributive and procedural justice as well as of narratives. Therefore, the further exploration of information and its transmission through narratives offers potential to improve stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects. The goal is to expand the knowledge about acceptance in wind energy projects and the use of narratives in stakeholder engagement and connect these two literature streams. This is to help practitioners conduct stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects more effectively and contribute to the existing literature on social acceptance and the use of narratives in stakeholder engagement.

1.4 Research questions

In order to fulfil the above stated aim, two main research questions have been formulated to guide this research. Each research question is further defined by one or three sub questions:

(RQ 1) What elements of information are conveyed in stakeholder engagement according to the literature and mentioned by stakeholders in investigated wind energy projects in Germany?

(RQ 1.1) How is the importance of these elements of information perceived amongst stakeholders in selected wind energy projects in Germany?

(RQ 2) According to the interviewed stakeholders, what potentials do narratives in stakeholder engagement bear in and beyond the two investigated wind energy projects in Germany?

(RQ 2.1) According to the respondents’ perceptions, what needs to be considered when using narratives in stakeholder engagement in and beyond the investigated wind energy projects in Germany?

(RQ 2.2) What content appears in narratives used in the stakeholder engagement in the investigated wind energy projects in Germany?

(RQ 2.3) How do interviewed stakeholders perceive the used narratives in relation to their acceptance of the respective wind energy project?

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organized in six chapters. It starts with the introduction that provides background information on wind energy production involving its past and current development in Germany and sets the research aim and corresponding research questions in context to sustainable development. The second chapter portrays relevant theories that form the theoretical framework of the thesis. It encompasses literature on social acceptance with a specific focus on the following topics: (1) community acceptance and its main elements trust, distributive and procedural justice, (2) information as an essential part of procedural justice as well as (3) narratives in general and, particularly, their use in stakeholder engagement. A brief discussion on the origins and development of literature on stakeholder engagement is included within. In chapter three, the exploratory research approach is explained and reasoned for. Chosen methods for data collection (semi-structured interviews) as well as data analysis (interpretative phenomenological analysis) are presented. At this stage, reliability, validity, ethical considerations as well as limitations are included. In chapter four the two examined wind energy projects are introduced and the main findings will be displayed. Data gathered on the research phenomenon – narratives occurring in stakeholder engagement within the investigated wind
energy projects are presented. Subsequently, in chapter five, the responses by the interviewees regarding information are analysed and merged with findings from the literature and compiled into a comprehensive list. The findings regarding narratives are then analysed by comparing and contrasting both projects while setting them in relation to the literature presented in the theoretical framework. Thereby, insights on the potentials of narratives, considerations for narratives and examples of narratives are provided. This thesis ends with a discussion of the results and a conclusion situating such results in today’s context/debate, suggesting recommendations for practice and further research.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following chapter will present the theoretical framework of this thesis. Firstly, the concept of social acceptance will be explained with a focus on the community acceptance dimension including trust, distributive and procedural justice. A critical reflection on the conceptual model of social acceptance of renewable energy and a brief excursus into environmental justice are included as well. Secondly, a presentation of information in the context of procedural justice in wind energy projects will follow. This section (2.2) will be concluded with a list of information that existing literature considers to be important in the stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects. The last part of this chapter will present narratives in general and specifically in the context of stakeholder engagement with a brief excursus into stakeholder theory. In this section the historical background of the concept of narratives will be elucidated, a critical reflection regarding the ethical use of narratives and a definition of the term ‘narrative’ for this thesis will be given.

These theories and concepts were chosen to support answering the research questions. The reason for presenting the concept of social acceptance is two-fold. Firstly, it fosters an understanding of the building blocks of social acceptance. This will help to allocate the contribution of this thesis and to see the perceived potentials of and considerations for narratives mentioned by respondents in reference to social acceptance. Secondly, the theory will portray the importance of information as an essential part for perceived fairness in renewable energy projects (particularly wind energy) and thereby emphasise the relevance of research questions 1 and 1.1 regarding transmitted information in wind energy projects. The section about Information will provide the basis for compiling a comprehensive list of information conveyed in wind energy projects in Germany (RQ 1). Moreover, it presents the link between social acceptance and narratives, as the content of narratives is seen to (possibly) transmit such information. The last section about narratives will provide a definition for narratives that enables identification of such in the gathered data. Therefore, its contribution to identifying the content of narratives (RQ 2.2) and for setting a frame of the phenomenon under investigation (i.e. narratives) is essential and provides a solid basis for answering research question 2 including its sub-questions.

2.1 Social Acceptance in wind energy

The following section will first present a conceptual model of social acceptance of renewable energy commonly referred to by researchers. It will investigate social acceptance in wind energy projects and briefly describe its three dimensions: socio-political, market and community acceptance. Then, due to its overall importance for this thesis, community acceptance will be discussed in more depth. First, a brief excursus showcasing the origins of environmental justice will be done. Second, the key components of community acceptance – namely trust, distributive and procedural justice – will be elaborated on.
2.1.1 Conceptualizing social acceptance

As referred to in the introduction, Carlman was one of the first scholars to investigate local opposition against wind energy as a result of missing public acceptance. She expanded the until then prevalent opinion that questions by the public in this regard were considered non-technical factors (Carlman, 1984 in Wüstenhagen et al., 2007). Unlike today, especially in the 1980s and 90s, scholars and politicians paid relatively little attention to local opposition because the generally high acceptance of renewable energy created the impression that locals would not oppose renewable energy technology. Interestingly, this assumption is still nurtured by relatively stable levels of strong general acceptance in today’s context – for example, with over 80% of respondents in a representative study speaking in favour of the usage and further deployment of wind energy in Germany (Fachagentur Windenergie an Land, 2019).

The authors Wüstenhagen, Wolsink and Bürer (2007) build upon Carlman’s research and differentiate between three dimensions that constitute social acceptance: socio-political, public and market acceptance (see Figure 1). Each dimension encompasses different actors and thus creates an understanding of the interplay of partly contrasting facets relevant for social acceptance (Devine-Wright, Batel, Aas, Sovacool, Carnegie Labelle, & Ruud, 2017). What follows is a brief portrayal of the conceptual model of social acceptance of renewable energy innovation.

![Figure 1 Triangle of social acceptance of renewable energy innovation, taken from Wüstenhagen et al. (2007)](image)

**Socio-political acceptance** is concerned with social acceptance on a more general level, influenced by policy frameworks and technologies. It deals with how these are perceived by the general public, key stakeholders and policymakers. This encompasses, for example, effective policymaking that supports both, community and market acceptance. Inter alia, Wüstenhagen et al. (2007, p. 2685) refer to establishing a framework around “spatial planning systems” that allows for decisions to be taken in a collaborative manner. Similarly, measures for financial participation and/or compensation depend on how effectively and incentivising those policies are designed. This refers to both, how uncomplicated these policies are to be implemented and offered by operators as well as how easy local stakeholders – the community and citizens alike – can enter into participation models for monetary benefit distribution (Scherhaufer et al, 2017).
Market acceptance describes the diffusion and acceptance of an innovation within the market. It is concerned with how an innovation, in this thesis particularly wind power plants, is adopted by the market and its individual actors. Due to the physical and visible attributes of wind power infrastructure, the diffusion is more complex than other innovative products discussed in literature on innovation diffusion (Wüstenhagen et al., 2007). Considering the date of publishing of the triangle of social acceptance of renewable energy innovation, it is of course arguable if wind turbines should still be considered as innovation in nowadays context. But, despite the familiar sight of wind turbines across Germany’s landscape, the novel impact a new wind development project would have for local residents may still be perceived as renewable energy innovation – thus likely having an influence on market, and consequently, social acceptance.

Another aspect that stands in connection to market acceptance is the focus on investors. By becoming or being active in an energy cooperative, thereby participating in potentially investing in and/or producing or prosuming renewable energy through wind power, consuming residents can become investors themselves (Wüstenhagen et al.’s, 2007).

Community acceptance considers the concrete acceptance of the local stakeholders including citizens and authorities in regard to the installation of new energy projects in their spatial proximity. This dimension encompasses the elements trust as well as distributive and procedural justice. In short, trust obtains a crucial role in shaping social acceptance, influencing and being influenced by perceived procedural and distributive justice (Ellis & Ferraro, 2016). Distributive justice is understood as the fair distribution of a project’s outcomes – positive and negative – between stakeholders (Kuehn, 2000). Procedural justice, on the other hand, describes the fairness of the entire process and its decisions that are based on “rights of participation, access to information, and lack of bias on the part of the decision-maker” (Gross, 2007, p. 2729). Further explanation is provided in section 2.1.2 Community acceptance.

It should be mentioned here that the framework was adapted and expanded in recent years. Sovacool and Lakshmi Ratan (2012), for example, make a clearer distinction between the socio-political and community dimension. They are focussing on policies and frameworks that foster market and community acceptance without including general public acceptance in the socio-political dimension. In addition to that, the authors Devine-Wright et al. (2017, p. 28) formulate pragmatic criticism in the way that “the framework is weakened by a lack of emphasis upon how each dimension inter-relates across different geographical scales (from macro to micro; international, national and local).“ That is why their extension of the framework considers and integrates the belief systems – stemming from theoretical ideas within social sciences – of specific stakeholders, i.e. social actors like policy makers and community leaders, that are involved along the mentioned scales. Those stakeholders have a fundamental impact on social acceptance of innovative (energy) technologies and generally energy systems change. A particular role is ascribed to stakeholders/social actors that mediate and accompany the stakeholder engagement and thus „influence transitions by making change upstream (to top actors), downstream (to bottom actors) and sideways (to other middle agents)“ (Devine-Wright et al., 2017, p. 30) – also referred to as middle actors by authors Parag and Yanda (2014).
2.1.2 Community acceptance

Albeit a generally high level of acceptance of renewables – including wind energy – among the general public as mentioned earlier, there is a discrepancy between such overarching support and local receptivity for policy implementation and siting decisions (Wüstenhagen et al., 2007), expressed as “frequent local hostility towards specific project proposals” (Devine-Wright, 2011, p. xxiii). The indicated discrepancy – what Bell, Gray and Haggett (2005) also refer to as “social gap” – is often verbalized as NIMBY which stands for ‘Not-In-My-Back-Yard’. This reflects individual “resistance to siting specific projects close to one’s area of residence while exhibiting acceptance of similar projects elsewhere” (Petrova, 2013, p.1). Following the authors Cass and Walker (2009 in Reusswig et al., 2016), the term NIMBY not only describes local opposition, but is also negatively connoted and therefore – inevitably or purposely – discredits opposing citizens, since they are portrayed to be against commonly accepted projects. Citizens associated as NIMBYs are usually perceived as “being too emotional to deal with development proposals in a sufficiently rational manner; being ignorant of the facts; and being overtly selfish in focusing upon private disbenefits, while overlooking important public or collective benefits arising from development.” (Devine-Wright, 2011 in Reusswig et al., 2016, p. 214). However, all authors in the reviewed literature consider the argument of NIMBY to be oversimplifying the opposing and complex motives of local stakeholders by neglecting sociocultural and other contextual factors (e.g. Bell et al., 2005; Wüstenhagen et al., 2007; Petrova, 2013; Devine-Wright, 2014; Reusswig et al., 2016). It is crucial to acknowledge the subjective associations about emotional or symbolic value that local stakeholders attribute to the location of a development site, “places replete with memories, experiences, stories and myths that are as much a feature of any locality as the soil type, height above sea level or average wind speed.” (Devine-Wright, 2014, p. 59). Additionally, it should be mentioned that community acceptance may change and evolve over time. Wolsink (2007) describes social acceptance to follow a U-curve when going through the stages of a project: while local acceptance is rather high in the beginning, it changes to relatively low acceptance during the project when siting decisions are made. When the project is realised and turbines are running, acceptance starts to rise again (Wolsink, 2007).

In the following, the elements trust, distributive and procedural justice will be explained. A brief excursus is inserted after trust in order to ensure a contextual classification in regard to the underlying meaning and importance of (environmental) justice.
2.1.2.1 Trust
Trust is an important and underlying factor for social acceptance in the context of wind energy development projects. However, due to its complex and multifaceted character, it is difficult to fully explore the concept and notions of trust (Ellis & Ferraro, 2016). Nevertheless, some relevant elements corresponding to trust should be mentioned here. Putting trust in relation to wind energy projects lets one think about the relationship between the affected community and, probably, unknown external actors approaching the community. As wind energy projects are/were usually realised by large, profit oriented companies in the past years and decades, this may have an influence on the individual perception of trust by the affected community and its members when confronted with a new wind energy development proposal. The question then arises if the local community trusts the information as well as explanations and intentions of the investor (Wüstenhagen et al., 2007). Following Walker, Wiersma and Bailey (2014), trust enables accessing and engaging as well as communicating and cooperating with (closed) communities. However, building up trust can be a lengthy process and it is not guaranteed that genuine offers by project developers of financial participation for the local community or informal and formal stakeholder involvement leads to gaining trust (Walker et al., 2014). Nevertheless, these measures of distributive and procedural justice are essential for both, trust and community acceptance, and will be further elaborated in the following two sections.

2.1.2.2 Environmental justice - a brief excursus
Within community acceptance and to pay tribute to local peculiarities that were mentioned before, research has suggested that procedural and distributive justice are considered important factors in raising acceptance among stakeholders (Gross, 2007; Wüstenhagen et al., 2007). In order to provide a profound understanding of the role of distributive and procedural justice for the creation of social/community acceptance, it is first reasonable to undertake a contextual classification in regard to the underlying meaning and importance of (environmental) justice for the whole of society: the demand for a just – or synonymously fair – and equal treatment is a fundamental concern within and, often times, reason for societal and environmental movements (Gross, 2007). It is prevalent in debates around climate change in general and also accounts to energy infrastructure development projects such as wind or solar farms (Ruddat & Sonnberger, 2019). Gross (2007, p. 2729) compiles different definitions from justice theory, including Hart’s (1961) formulation of justice to be “maintaining or restoring a balance or proportion.”, leading up to environmental justice as a combination of social justice and environmentalism as concluded by Kuehn (2000).

Environmental justice, which, during the civil rights movement in the US in the 1980s, was predominantly concerned with the unbalanced distribution of negative environmental implications, has been extended by, inter alia, authors Kuehn (2000) and Schlosberg (2004). They advocate to also include a fair process that enables participation in decision-making as well as respect for and recognition of all stakeholders (Kuehn, 2000 and Schlosberg, 2004 as mentioned in Gross, 2007).

2.1.2.3 Distributive justice
Distributive justice is understood as the equitable distribution of a project’s outcomes, both benefits and burdens (Langer et al., 2016). This not only accounts for environmental impacts that come along with a project or development. In wind energy projects distributive justice specifically refers to financial aspects and benefits as well as participation schemes thereof. In order to reduce financial imbalances within a community, Scherhaufer et al. (2017, p. 868) recommend that a “fair local allocation of monetary benefits” is essential. For example, this may be achieved when revenues are transparently linked to and used for planned investments within the municipality. Similarly, equitably distributing the
profits among the entire, or at least, a substantial part of the community is possible through energy cooperatives. Locally affected citizens can participate from the local energy through wind turbines by holding shares and/or through consuming less expensive energy, eventually prosuming (Klagge & Meister, 2018).

In this context, Gross (2007) mentions the evaluation of fairness of the distribution process by those who either have personal gains or losses. They are concerned with outcome favourability which categorises them into winners and losers of a wind energy development project. Here, within the distribution of monetary assets, envy plays an important role as well. The authors Langer et al. (2016) refer to enviousness as a feeling of discontent about the possessions of others. This phenomenon refers to citizens who are envious about the financial support some community members, or even neighbours, receive when leasing their land to deploy wind turbines. While some may profit financially, the ones who live close by have to cope with the visual impact and not get compensated. This may have a severe impact on interpersonal relations, resulting in a divided community (Langer et al., 2016).

2.1.2.4 Procedural justice

One key principle of procedural justice refers to the general possibility of full participation in the engagement. Gross (2007) summarizes further principles ranging from recognition and consideration of one’s expressed opinion and respectful treatment to an impartial proceeding of the leading decision maker and, lastly, that decisions depend on information and are not set in stone when new information emerges. Engaging (affected) community members in a process is supposed to go further than a mere notification or information process (Gross, 2007). Rather, a consultation and decision-making process “focusing on recognition, capabilities and participation” that gives local citizens a stake in the negotiation about, for example, the location (considering distance to residential areas) and number of wind turbines, may lead to an increased acceptance of wind energy within the community (Scherhaufer et al., 2017, p. 864).

Another key element expressed within procedural justice is access to information, its continuous collection and transparent transfer as well as information in general. Due to a non-unified approach when referring to information prevalent in academic literature on wind energy, section 2.2 (Information in wind energy projects) elaborates more thoroughly on this and provides a non-exhaustive list of information following the first research aim of this thesis.

Involving the public in a dialogue not only offers a place for citizens to raise their concerns and questions, it may also provide fruitful feedback for the project developer (i.e. energy firm) to incorporate in the planning and thus ease potential opposing actors (Dütschke et al., 2017). Additionally, the timing component of stakeholder/citizen inclusion is an important element for a perceived fair process. Authors are in agreement that engagement should start early and continue throughout the project (e.g. Gross, 2007; Dütschke et al., 2017; Scherhaufer et al., 2017).

To summarize, how participants perceive and evaluate the fairness of an engagement/decision-making process highly depends on the adherence and application of the above stated principles. Distributive and procedural justice both contain relevant factors that influence community acceptance and ought to be considered individually and in connection with each other, depending on the context of the respective wind energy project. This then also builds the bridge to trust in the way that “people who feel that they have been treated fairly are more likely to accept the decisions resulting from the process, and also will be more likely to trust the institution making the decision” (Gross, 2007, p.2730).
2.2 Information in wind energy projects

Information, as part of procedural justice in wind energy projects, has been identified and described by multiple scholars in differing range and detail (Gross, 2007; Scherhaufer et al., 2017; Wüstenhagen et al., 2007). A historical trend is noticeable where early research on the one hand (e.g. Gross, 2007) only gives broad suggestions about the characteristics information in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects should fulfil. Later studies (e.g. Scherhaufer et al., 2017; Simcock, 2016) on the other hand go more into depth and also include the content that the information should contain. Exactly this dispersion between different research calls for a comprehensive list of information conveyed in wind energy projects. Through the compilation of selected academic articles contributed to this area, a general list of information (including character and type of the information) — which is particularly important for practical application — is generated (see Table 1). First, the characteristics of information: Gross (2007) explains that the information should be adequate, timely, of the correct scope, objective and available (p. 2732). Simcock (2016) adds to these characteristics that the information should be accurate. (In his work appropriateness and sufficiency of information are also mentioned. However, these terms are considered synonymous with Gross’ adequate and of the right scope.) Second, the content of information: Wüstenhagen, Wolsink und Bürer (2007) explain that the communicated information should contain who the investor is, if the community – or part of it – is invited to participate, to what degree they can influence the project, and who decides upon this. Adding on, Simcock (2016) finds the number, size and location of the planned wind turbines to be of importance. A last and the most comprehensive research in terms of information in wind energy projects shall be mentioned here: Scherhaufer et al. (2017) note that next to the number, size and location of the planned wind turbines it should also be communicated what the local investments and benefits are and which environmental (e.g. impact on scenery), human (e.g. noise, shadow, ice shedding and light pollution) and ecological (e.g. impact on bird and bat population) impacts the planned wind project will have.

Table 1 List of information gathered from the literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information character/content</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adequate/appropriate</td>
<td>Gross, 2007/Simcock, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely</td>
<td>Gross, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of the correct scope/sufficient</td>
<td>Gross, 2007/Simcock, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Gross, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available</td>
<td>Gross, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accurate</td>
<td>Simcock, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature conservation/environmental impact</td>
<td>Reussweg et al. 2016, Scherhaufer et al. 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Impact on the scenery</td>
<td>Scherhaufer et al. 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Impact on bird population</td>
<td>Scherhaufer et al. 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Impact on bat population</td>
<td>Scherhaufer et al. 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General technical information/possibilities</td>
<td>Simcock, 2016; Scherhaufer et al. 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Number of planned turbines</td>
<td>Simcock, 2016; Scherhaufer et al. 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Size of planned turbines</td>
<td>Simcock, 2016; Scherhaufer et al. 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Location of planned turbines</td>
<td>Simcock, 2016; Scherhaufer et al. 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immisions/impact on humans</td>
<td>Scherhaufer et al. 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Noise</td>
<td>Scherhaufer et al. 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Shadow</td>
<td>Scherhaufer et al. 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ice shedding</td>
<td>Scherhaufer et al. 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Light pollution</td>
<td>Scherhaufer et al. 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Health aspects</td>
<td>Reussweg et al. 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Scherhaufer et al., 2017 do not specifically examine information as part of procedural justice. However, since they acknowledge the framework for procedural justice and mention information, relevant to local stakeholders under another frame, their findings will be included in this section.
The compiled list shows that information in wind energy projects should include the communities’ involvement (on a procedural level as well as financially), technical data (size, location and number of wind turbines) and environmental, human and ecological impact. These elements of information should be adequate, objective, available, of correct scope, accurate and provided timely. This list gives a good, categorial overview of which information is important to be conveyed in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects and partially mentions specific elements of information. However, it fails to specify concrete elements of information in certain categories (e.g. long-term plans for wind turbines - repowering or disassembly and removal). The authors acknowledge that it is not possible to set a specified, concrete list of elements of information that will fit every wind energy project, because every project is undertaken in a different geographical and cultural context. Therefore, the valuable information has to be context specific. However, this list provides a good basis to build upon when complementing it with the gathered data. The then compiled list strives towards completeness to provide a reference for any wind energy project in Germany in the process of deciding which elements of information to gather and share with the stakeholders.

2.3 Narratives and stakeholder engagement – Origin, explanation and relation

The discourse about the meaning and use of narratives and stories goes back as far as Plato and Aristotle to the word logos. Logos, before Plato and Aristotle, meant “story, reason, rationale, conception, discourse and/or thought” (Fisher, 1985, p. 74). In other words, all forms of human communication counted as logos until Plato and Aristotle distinguished between logos and mythos (Fisher, 1985) – between truth, facts, knowledge on the one hand and poetry, fiction, stories on the other hand. Over the course of the next centuries many scientists and philosophers tried to foster the notion that there was a clear distinction between facts and imaginary stories. In 1985, however, Fisher developed the so-called narrative paradigm, expressing the view that all humans are storytellers and that stories are the basis of how humans make sense of, interpret the world and take decisions. With this thought he is leading back to the original meaning of logos that connected facts, knowledge and truth with imaginary, subjective stories as an inseparable entity.

It has been found that through the use of stories with the combination of logic and emotion (what Aristotle called logos and pathos) the “willingness by the audience to respond and act upon the information given” (Sundin et al., 2018, p. 3) can increase. In addition, the creation of a safe space, where stories of opposing parties can be shared has been acknowledged to lead to higher potentials of mediation, negotiation, conflict resolution (Sandercock, 2003), novel solutions and compromises (Quick, 2018). Quick (2018) and Sandercock (2003) suggest that such safe spaces can be created through collectively defined narratives that constitute the frame of the stakeholder engagement.

In academic literature focussed on narratives on a conceptual level as well as in performing arts and screenwriting, a difference is made between narrative and story. Story is equated with content and a narrative is the vehicle for transporting the story (or content) while simultaneously encompassing it (Ryan, 2007). However, in research where narratives are investigated in stakeholder engagement processes in real life, the terms story and narrative are sometimes used synonymously. In line with
most of the literature, this thesis sees narratives as the vehicle for a story – i.e. storytelling that includes the story. Beyond this rough outline of narratives, efforts to define the concept of a narrative have been made by a multitude of scholars. Though, it seems as if the number of different definitions is almost as high as the number of scholars who have dedicated themselves to this undertaking. The only universal agreement of how a narrative is defined is the existence of content (Ryan, 2007). If there is no content in a narrative, it cannot be a narrative.

However, in order to identify a narrative as the phenomenon under investigation of this thesis, a more specific definition is needed to distinguish it from other forms of communication that contain content (for example a list of information or a report). Therefore, the following research will be based upon Roe’s definition of narratives as “stories that describe a problem, lay out its consequences and suggest (simple) solutions” (Roe, 1994 in Hermwille, 2016, p. 4). This definition is also in line with “the representation of a sequence of events, [which is] the most universally accepted feature of narrative[s]” (Ryan, 2007, p. 25). The events in Roe’s definition are represented as a problem, its consequences and one or more solutions.

Narratives and the stories they contain can be regarded as “meaning encoded in language” (Hermwille, 2016, p. 4). Thus, a narrative does not only convey informational facts but also attaches meaning to them which “shapes the recipients’ understanding of the same facts” (Hermwille, 2016, p. 4; based on Gadinger, Jarzabski & Yildiz, 2014). In addition to the communication of information, its attributed meaning and interpretation, Throgmorton (1996; in Sandercock, 2003) argues that stories need authority – i.e. reliable proof composed into a convincing argument. Exactly in this organisation of “knowledge around our need to act and our moral concerns” (Sandercock, 2003, p. 19), he sees the power of persuasion of narratives. Future-oriented narratives, according to Throgmorton (1996; in Sandercock, 2003), not only have a persuasive character but also a constitutive one, i.e. future-oriented narratives used by planners shape the discourse and the community including its culture. Both, the character of persuasion as well as the character of constitution entail the adherence to ethical consideration when choosing the narratives and a way to convey them. The more potential narratives offer to persuade, the more carefully their use and aim should be considered. Furthermore, what has to be respected, is that the narrative must always be fitted to the context and especially the audience. Every audience member has basic assumptions and values – Quick (2018) calls them master narratives and Sandercock (2003) core stories – that shape their perception and understanding of the presented narrative (Bruner, 1991).

In light of the explanations above a ‘good’ narrative can be considered as describing a problem, its consequences and a suggested solution whilst attributing meaning and/or interpretation to the communicated information without forgetting ethical and contextual considerations.

For the above-mentioned qualities (i.e. power of persuasion, communication of information attributed with interpretation and meaning) narratives pose a valuable tool for stakeholder engagement (Quick, 2018). Different forms of narratives have been used and researched in collective planning and stakeholder engagement. Sandercock (2003), Miller et al. (2015) and Quick (2018) used narrative methods to give citizen stakeholders in planning processes a chance to express their views (including factual and emotional components) through storytelling. This natural, innate form of expression was shown to have a positive effect on the respective stakeholder engagement. Through the fuller picture (beyond facts) that stories convey, opposing parties were seen to gain a better understanding of what the storyteller meant and were therefore more receptive to opposing views. On a similar note, Sundin et al. (2018) found that scientific data and complex research have a higher chance of being retained by
non-scientific audiences when storytelling is used – when the data is packaged in a narrative that offers more levels to connect to the information than just the factual.

The use of narratives in stakeholder engagement described above presents a similar approach to stakeholder engagement as the more and more emerging cooperative forms of energy production (i.e. community-led and cross-sector collaborations). Since cooperative forms of energy production are often built on democratic principles and are dependent on community acceptance and support (for example to put up a new wind turbine), strong stakeholder engagement is required. Stakeholder theory appeared in academia in 1984 and was shaped by Freeman who called for the integration of any group that could affect or was affected by an organisation’s activity. With a larger body of literature building up on stakeholder theory, two streams emerged: management of stakeholders and management for stakeholders. Management of stakeholders, on the one hand, represents the notion that stakeholders provide resources to the organisation and are means to achieve the organisation’s goals. Focus is put on controlling stakeholders and thereby guaranteeing the least disturbance of the organisation’s activities (Eskerod & Huemann, 2013). On the other hand, management for stakeholders is concerned with considering interests and the right to attention of every stakeholder. Here the focus lies on mutual value creation and the sharing of information and ideas (Eskerod & Huemann, 2013).

Especially in sustainable projects the management-for-stakeholders-approach is gaining popularity. Due to its core values of transparency, trust and fairness (Huemann, Eskerod, & Ringhofer, 2016; Huemann & Silvius, 2017) it is particularly suitable for stakeholder engagement that seeks working together instead of trying to control each other. As explained in the presentation of the results of this research below, these values are highly important for stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects in Germany.

The term ‘stakeholder engagement’ in this thesis is used rather widely. The authors deliberately decided upon this in order to acknowledge the peculiarities of wind energy project in small communities. It is assumed that interactions between stakeholders beyond officially organised stakeholder engagement events shape citizens’ attitudes, behaviours as well as perceptions of the respective wind energy project.
3. Methodology and Methods

In the following section the general approach to this research will be outlined. The used methodology, data collection and analysis methods will be elucidated and matters of reliability, validity, ethical considerations as well as limitations will be discussed.

3.1 Research approach and design

Since there have previously not been any studies conducted on the phenomenon of narratives used in wind energy projects, the authors chose an exploratory approach to the study. Semi-structured interviews (data collection) and interpretative phenomenological analysis (data analysis) have been selected as research methods. This choice appears reasonable due to theoretical foundation in social acceptance and narratives and especially the aim to study people's perceptions of narratives in wind energy projects and their link to the acceptance of such projects. Following Silverman (2015), the choice of the two studied projects was made to allow comparative inferences. Even though the two projects differ vastly in structure, size and completion stage, they still share the connecting features of geographical (German) context and a cooperative approach to stakeholder engagement. Therefore, they represent vastly different cases with a high level of variation to “capture the heterogeneity of a population” (Silverman, 2015, p. 123). This allows for extensive comparison and contrast of the two projects.

In order to support the exploratory character of this study, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2007) has been chosen for its exploratory features and the freedom it allows in identifying repeating themes in gathered data. More importantly, it focuses on life experiences of individuals and their sense-making (interpretation) of such experiences. This goes hand in hand with the study’s research aim of investigating stakeholders’ perceptions of narratives and their impact on acceptance towards the investigated wind energy projects. IPA focusses on in-depth perceptions and understandings of a specific (small) group of people instead of pursuing generalization (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Therefore, a relatively small sample size (10 respondents) was chosen allowing for more in-depth analysis. The latter is crucial to IPA. In addition, the homogeneity of the sample is essential to IPA’s pursuit to give information about the perceptions of a small group of people. This was ensured through examining two wind energy projects in Germany, interviewing different stakeholders in each of them. Furthermore, in line with Edmund Husserl’s demand that a phenomenon can only be understood when looking at it from different perspectives, the sample includes different stakeholders (i.e. planners, citizens, mediators, private companies and municipality representatives) (Ihde, 2012). They represent different motives and attitudes towards the wind energy projects. With this, the authors hope to gather a comprehensive picture of perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation, i.e. the perception of narratives in two different wind energy projects and their link to acceptance of such projects.

3.2 Data collection

The theoretical foundation for this thesis is based on a review of two different literature streams – social acceptance of renewable energy projects (specifically in the context of wind energy) and narratives with a focus on narratives in stakeholder engagement. Out of this review a list was compiled encompassing various categories of information that are transmitted in stakeholder engagement processes in wind energy projects. This list was complemented by primary data collection (RQ 1, 1.1) and supports the investigation of narratives used and/or experienced by interviewees in two wind energy projects in Germany (RQ 2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3).
The primary data was retrieved through semi-structured interviews with selected stakeholders (i.e. mediator, municipality and local representatives, project planners, nature conservation organisation and energy cooperative representative) of two wind energy projects in Germany adding up to a total of nine interviews (one interview hosted two respondents at the same time) (see Table 2 below). The first project is a cross-sector collaboration led by an energy firm that stands in close connection to the local municipality and engages in informal citizen participation. It is located in West Germany and has currently been put on hold due to an examination of the land-use plan by the state court. The energy firm aspires to deploy six to eight wind turbines and allow for (financial) citizen participation in some form. The second project is a citizen-led energy cooperative located in East Germany that has been completed and is producing electricity with two wind turbines. The energy cooperative is composed of roughly 240 members (mostly from the local community) and also engages in other forms of decentralised renewable energy production striving for energy autarky. All interviews were conducted in the period April 27 through May 12, 2020. Six of the nine interviews were conducted via Zoom video chat and three via telephone - depending on preference and accessibility of the respondents. The selection of the stakeholders was an adaptive process based on suggestions made by first contact persons with the aim to gather data from different perspectives of and positions within the project. All interviewees gave their consent (that was recorded) to the interviews being recorded and the data used in anonymised form in this master thesis.

The reason for choosing both of these qualitative research methods is twofold (Kvale, 2008): First, to explore the use and content of constructed or perceived narratives in wind energy projects. Second, to understand the individual experiences of involved stakeholders in wind energy projects in relation to perceived acceptance of such projects. The synthesis of the collected data and literature was used to compile a list of elements of information conveyed in the planning and consultation process of the selected wind energy projects. Moreover, the exploratory research aimed to find narratives potentially used by stakeholders, the information these narratives contained and the perception of such narratives by stakeholders in connection to their acceptance of the project. It is of great interest to identify considerations for and potentials of narratives brought forward by the respondents.

Table 2 List of interview partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Position/Function</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a</td>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>April 29th 2020</td>
<td>31m40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b</td>
<td>Municipal representative (urban planning depart)</td>
<td>April 27th 2020</td>
<td>45m31s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c</td>
<td>Local representative</td>
<td>May 5th 2020</td>
<td>33m26s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1d</td>
<td>Project planner</td>
<td>May 5th 2020</td>
<td>56m35s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1e</td>
<td>Nature conservation organisation</td>
<td>May 12th 2020</td>
<td>61m20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1f</td>
<td>Nature conservation organisation</td>
<td>May 12th 2020</td>
<td>61m20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>Energy cooperative representative</td>
<td>May 4th 2020</td>
<td>36m45s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>Former energy cooperative member (Public Relations)</td>
<td>May 4th 2020</td>
<td>43m52s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2c</td>
<td>Project Planner</td>
<td>May 11th 2020</td>
<td>43m01s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2d</td>
<td>Local representative</td>
<td>May 11th 2020</td>
<td>32m02s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Data analysis

Adhering to the method of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2007), the transcribed interviews form the basis for the analysis process. After transcribing the interviews, the authors, following Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) and Smith and Osborn (2007), together went through the transcripts to analyse the gathered data and extract themes, one abstraction level higher than the initial statements. The formulation of themes followed the endeavour to find connections between verbalized perceptions/interpretations of interviewees and the main topics of this thesis - information, narratives and acceptance. Additional background information
provided by the respondents helping to shape the understanding of each wind energy project was also themed and gathered next to the research focus. This allowed examining the key topics with a better understanding of the context. The emerging themes were then transferred into mind maps (one for each wind energy project), concentrated under overarching cluster terms – once again abstracting them one more level – in relation to the main phenomenon (i.e. the perception of narratives in wind energy projects and their link to acceptance of such projects). At this point, the analysis split into two parts: (1) the data containing pieces of information communicated in stakeholder engagement in the wind energy projects under investigation and (2) the data that stands in connection to narratives. While the former was simply gathered, classified into categories (i.e. clusters) and then merged with the prior compiled list of information, the latter underwent a more extensive interpretative process by the authors as exemplified by the chosen analysis method IPA.

In a second step, all the interviews were scanned again with the already emerged themes and clusters in mind, to search for data that might have been overlooked in the first analysis step. Themes that did not find sufficient support were dropped. In a third step, the two mind maps were compared and contrasted to allow interpretation of differences and similarities between the two examined projects and answer the research questions guiding this paper.

3.4 Reliability, validity and ethical considerations

Efforts have been made to ensure the reliability and validity of this study. Regarding reliability, firstly, a thorough description of and reasoning for the data collection and especially the data analysis have been outlined above to ensure the understanding of this thesis’ research approach. Secondly, the interview guide is attached to the study to give future researchers the possibility to recreate the interviews (see Appendix 1 and 2). With that being said, the interviews were of semi-structured nature, which implies a somewhat loose usage of the interview guide and to follow a reactive handling of the interviews. Thirdly, the authors jointly worked on the interview guide creation, on all interviews and on the analysis process to ensure inter-rater reliability (Silverman, 2015), i.e. the reliability that both researchers understood, coded and interpreted the gathered data in the same way. Lastly, low-inference descriptors (Silverman, 2015) were ensured through tape recordings of all interviews and careful transcriptions.

In the pursuit of ensuring validity, the authors considered construct validity as well as internal and external validity (6 & Bellamy, 2012). During the conducted research it became clear that the concept of narratives is to a certain extent fluid and people (in academia and daily life) have different conceptions about what constitutes a narrative. To make sure that responders understood what serves as a definition of narratives in this thesis, they were provided with an explanation and, where needed, with examples of narratives to create a common understanding about the phenomenon under investigation. However, some responders still attributed a negative meaning to the word narrative as in a tall tale, in which case specific efforts were made to clarify the authors’ definition of a narrative. The only claim of internal validity this study makes is about the causality between perceived narratives and the acceptance of wind energy projects from respondents’ perspectives. Therefore, internal validity is provided as far as the respondents answered truthfully and are clear about the causality of the two factors within themselves. This thesis makes no claims of (proven) generalisations beyond the two examined wind energy projects. Thus, external validity is not further considered.

According to Silverman (2011), codes and consent, confidentiality and trust are mentioned as the three most relevant ethical considerations for research in Western culture. In light of codes and consent, every respondent was explained the topic and reason for the study and verbal consent to the anonymised use of the data was given and recorded. In the one case where a review of the used
citations was requested, it was granted. With anonymisation of the interviewees’ names and the exact locations of the two projects, full confidentiality is guaranteed. By offering full transparency of the research project and approaching (potential) respondents in a proactive but not intrusive, in a curious but not nosey manner, a trustful relationship was established allowing for open communication.

3.5 Limitations

Certain limitations were set to define the object of study and to support the answering of the research questions. Firstly, only wind energy projects were considered as subject of the study because wind energy (currently) makes up the majority of renewable energy produced in Germany (Stratmann, 2020) and faces especially high rates of acceptance problems, predominantly due to visual impact, noise emission and unequal distribution of benefits. Therefore, it is the most relevant energy source and presents itself as not comparable to other renewables in this context. Secondly, using IPA makes one prone to interpretation. Since IPA is based on the double hermeneutics of respondents’ interpretations of their experience and then the researcher’s interpretation of that data, a risk is resumed to lose valuable data in the two rounds of interpretation or misinterpret at some point and, thus, draw wrong conclusions and produce false outcomes. However, the use of IPA offers a great possibility to go deep into the gathered data and therefore reach deeper understanding of people’s perceptions of the investigated phenomenon.

In addition, some limitations imposed themselves upon this research. Due to the fact that the interviews were conducted via Zoom video chat and telephone, thus only partially face-to-face, a different situation compared to a personal interview in situ was created. This left the interviewers with less complete data regarding body language and surrounding factors. Moreover, technical difficulties occasionally led to interruptions that might have altered the course of the interviews. However, the respondents were interviewed in their own homes or offices which might have led to a more relaxed interview environment and stimulated open communication and likely more extensive responses. Two interview partners requested to receive the interview guide in advance to get an understanding of the wider area of interest - this request was accommodated. The authors did not provide the interview guide to the other interviewees in order to get as unbiased/unprepared responses as possible. However, the two respondents who received the questions beforehand may have delivered more precise or thoughtful insights to the matter of interest. Furthermore, as described in 3.3 Reliability, validity and ethical considerations, respondents arrived with different preconceptions about the word narrative, which led to the need for explanation. Since this term has different connotations in the daily context for different respondents, a possible influence of these preconceptions on the given answers cannot be excluded, which might have led to a distorted gathering of data on the phenomenon – narratives in wind energy projects. Lastly, the stakeholder engagement of project #2 was conducted over a longer period of time which lead to a more holistic picture of the process but also to incomplete memories and vagueness in some responses. Exactly to the contrary, project #1 is still in progress which means, that a holistic view of the project is not possible, but the memories of the stakeholder engagement so far were very fresh and concise.
4. Research findings

In the chapter below (4.1) project #1 will be introduced to provide background information in order to facilitate the reader’s understanding of the context. Ensuing the main findings of project #1 will be presented. Thereafter the same will be done with project #2. The main findings will be discussed individually to ensure a distinct view on each project. They present themselves as potentials of narratives, considerations for narratives as well as used and perceived narratives. The authors understand a 'used narrative' as one that has been observed by the respondents in the two examined wind energy projects. The term 'perceived narrative' expands the term 'used narratives' by narratives observed or heard about from other projects and by examples envisioned to be of use in wind energy projects in general, as perceived by the respondents. Since all the interviews were conducted in German, the authors have translated certain passages to better portray a comprehensive picture of the gathered data themselves.

4.1 Wind energy project #1 - Case presentation and main findings

4.1.1 Object of study

The first chosen project is located in West-Germany in a low mountain range and encompasses between 6 and 8 wind turbines. It was taken over by a private company, who now continues the planning and implementation of the project. The project presents itself as particularly complex due to the geological and geographical context. Certain turbines are planned to be built in steep forest terrain that makes the construction technically intricate (Respondent 1d) and poses an especially high visibility (Respondent 1b) as well as a potential threat to natural forest habitat for animals (Respondent 1f). Nevertheless, the project size makes it financially profitable and with the rising scarcity of suitable wind energy areas the geographical and geological circumstances are not extraordinary to cope with (Respondent 1d).

The project planners sought early alignment with the local municipal council in order to inform them of the project plan (Respondent 1d). The local municipal council then ordered the urban planning authority to develop a novel format of informal stakeholder engagement consisting of a general survey followed by an exhibition and a round table discussion (Respondent 1b). The survey was distributed to randomly selected 1000 inhabitants within a 5 km radius around the planned project independent of their residency in the city deciding over the project (i.e. also surrounding communes were included) (e.g. Respondent 1b).

The survey included general questions about wind energy as well as specific questions about the planned project, gathering a first collective opinion about the project and possible concerns (Respondent 1a). With the randomised dissemination of the survey the project planners and urban developers hoped to counter the occurrence that opposing actors tend to be more active and present in the discussion than supporters or citizens with a neutral attitude towards the project (Respondents 1b; Respondent 1d). Following the survey, the respondents were invited to an exhibition and round table discussion. The exhibition provided ‘speed input’ by different experts with booths and posters explaining interested participants about facets of wind energy projects in general and the specific project at hand (Respondent 1c). Subsequently the round table discussion was split in four to six tables, each discussing a topic for 20 minutes with professional mediators to facilitate the dialogue and experts to give input/answer questions at each table (Respondent 1b). After the stakeholder engagement event the head mediator with his/her team composed a document encompassing all opinions. They also gave a statement to the local politicians as a basis for decision making on the project (Respondent 1a).
This project takes place in a complex legal and social context encompassing the following components: (1) a land-use plan that is currently under revision of the second level of jurisdiction and (2) the decision making power of the local community, while (3) the majority of opinions expressed (in the surveys and round table discussions) were negative. Therefore, the local politicians decided to reject the plan in this form. However, there are still possibilities to adjust the plan and reapply for approval (Respondent 1d).

A multitude of data about other factors including underlying values/assumption, the complexity of the topic, trust and credibility, and the stakeholder engagement have been collected and significantly influenced the researchers understanding of the project for the analysis process. In addition, the contextual information represents valuable bridges to existing literature and aids in cross-linking the studied narratives with respective literature further fostering understanding. However, since this contextual information is not the main subject of this study, it shall not be further explained here. A complete mind map of themes and clusters derived from data concerning project #1 can be found in appendix 5.

4.1.2 Potentials of narratives

The first topic that contains many of the respondents’ mentioned themes is potentials of narratives in stakeholder engagement. Multiple potentials including increasing understanding, raising the quality of interaction, education and knowledge transfer, conveying a message but also potential misuse were perceived and will be described below.

**Increasing understanding and raising the quality of dialogue**

All respondents saw potentials in the use of narratives in wind energy projects. Respondent 1c particularly emphasised the possibility of using impactful events (e.g. the nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima Daiichi) as a connection point for narratives toward change. Respondents 1e and 1f agreed on the general use of storytelling on opposing and supporting sides of the wind energy project but had different perceptions of how extensively storytelling was used in the stakeholder engagement of the project. Addressing the issue of explaining the complex topic of wind energy in understandable terms respondent 1b saw a particular potential in communicating certain information through storytelling to increase understanding. Respondent 1a thought that exactly this enhanced understanding through narratives – enriching the message with emotion – would lead to better dialogue, compromises and acceptance as he/she expresses here:

So, I think, we will not make do without that [storytelling]. We need this emotional content, this really very intensive exchange to come through understanding to acceptance. If we simply deal with factual issues – that is a question of values – we will ultimately not advance in the discussion, because then we can only differentiate between black and white. But there is a lot in between and exactly this grey zone should be urgently discussed, in my opinion. And only then we will reach collective solutions. And only then we will reach acceptance. (Respondent 1a)

Respondent 1a also elucidated the relationship between dialogue and narratives. As dialogue is necessary for narratives to take place and narratives on their part then feed back into the dialogue by raising the quality of interaction.

**Education and knowledge transfer**

Multiple respondents further saw potentials of narratives in education and knowledge transfer. Respondent 1a described the use of storytelling by citizens, as helpful for the project planner. Citizens’ expressed views enable the project planner to learn about the importance of personal interaction with
the impacted community. Together with respondent 1c, they agreed that personal narratives by citizens had a major impact on local politicians. The citizens’ explanations about their situation and their reasoning behind supporting or opposing the wind energy project in question influenced the politicians’ decision regarding the project’s approval. From a project planner perspective, the use of storytelling when introducing a problem, laying out its consequences and suggesting solutions – thus transferring knowledge – was seen as a good means to reduce fear (e.g. fear of the unknown, of future development, of degradation of surrounding environment, of noise/light pollution) in the affected communities.

**Conveying a message**

Moreover, storytelling was seen to bear the potential to convey a message (Respondent 1f) by reporting personal experiences, emotions and feelings (Respondent 1a). Later, respondent 1c raised the importance of conveying emotions by stating that emotions and the overall purpose of the matter outweighed facts in the decision-making process. The project planner saw a potential to “sell” the projects through the use of narratives in persuading listeners (Respondent 1d). Respondent 1b supported this point in underlining the possibility to communicate the project planner’s perception of meaningful use of wind energy by using examples.

**Potential misuse**

Contrary to the aforementioned point, respondents 1c and 1d also elucidated a potential misuse of narratives in wind energy projects. Firstly, respondent 1c saw a danger in (manipulative) storytelling being used to divert from negative impacts of wind energy projects. Additionally, narratives about the energy transition and environmental protection were perceived to push a hidden, financial agenda. “Landowners make false pretences about environmental protection and the energy transition – which is definitely also a relevant factor – but they mainly do it [support the project] because it is profitable.” (Respondent 1c) Secondly, respondent 1d pointed out that it is always easier for opponents of wind energy projects to make unsubstantiated claims, than it is for advocates to refute such claims.

As shown above, the main findings concerning the potentials of narratives in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects of project #1 reveal multiple positive potentials, such as increasing understanding, raising the quality of interaction, education and knowledge transfer, and conveying a message. However, respondents in project #1 also perceived the potential of misuse of narratives in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects.

**4.1.3 Considerations for narratives**

In the context of wind energy projects the respondents of project #1 mentioned multiple points to be considered when using narratives in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects: the importance of simple messaging, the use of easy and understandable language, that contents are suitable, potentially suitable or unsuitable for being communicated through narratives and that the neutrality and skill of the storyteller play an important role. Additionally, two critical points about the use of narratives were made.

**The importance of simple messaging**

Firstly, the importance of simple messaging was mentioned by the project planner (Respondent 1d) and the urban planning department representative (Respondent 1b):

> The more complex your explanation has to be, the more difficult it will be for people to follow your argumentation and realise that you are right, which increases the difficulty of winning people over. (Respondent 1d)
In this line of thought the project planner (Respondent 1d) also mentioned that the use of easy and understandable language is necessary and can be aided by using examples. Emphasising the need for easy and understandable language, respondent 1b stated that the complexity of the topic (wind energy projects) makes the expression in simple terms difficult. Respondent 1b as well added the importance of considering the target group when framing the message.

**Suitable, potentially suitable and unsuitable content for narratives**

Secondly, respondent 1b alluded to categorise different content as being suitable, potentially suitable and unsuitable for narratives. On the one hand, “hard facts”, such as the necessary width of the road leading to the construction sites, present themselves as unsuitable for the use of narratives (Respondent 1b). On the other hand, topics that leave more margin for explanations or are more difficult to imagine, such as the level of noise a wind turbine would produce, provide potential for being communicated through storytelling. The best potential for narratives to be used, according to Respondent 1b, is found in “overarching narratives” about wind energy, the energy transition and climate change. This last point was further commented on by a local representative (Respondent 1c) stressing the importance of connecting the “overarching narratives” with the local context because citizens would first think about the immediate impact whilst only later considering broader effects. The mediator (Respondent 1a) noted that such “overarching narratives” would be most useful, if they contained different perspectives and neutral information instead of trying to push people into one direction. Respondent 1d added that the referencing of external third parties such as independent studies or policy papers may help to emanate neutrality.

**Neutrality and skill of the storyteller**

Thirdly, the storyteller as an entity was mentioned by four out of six respondents and two themes came through: neutrality and skills. Respondents 1a and 1b explicitly mentioned the importance of a neutral storyteller in order to ensure credibility and deviate from mistrust because of suspected hidden agendas. Respondent 1a furthermore emphasised the difficulty in attaining a truly neutral storyteller and the importance of neutrality of the storyteller, especially in the energy sector, because everybody is supposedly believed to be affiliated with certain sponsors, trying to push an agenda.

In terms of skill respondent 1d mentioned that from a project planner perspective the technical know-how and rhetorical skills are of essence for good storytelling and that these skills certainly build up with experience. Respondent 1a reported, that within the stakeholder engagement different levels of storytelling skills were perceived but that independent from the storytelling skill, it was a useful tool for everybody to express their messages. Respondent 1b explained, that he/she generally perceived stronger storytelling skills in wind energy opponents than in advocates.

**Critique**

Lastly, respondent 1e and respondent 1c expressed their critical view of the limited power of narratives to change deadlocked opinions, saying that especially fear inhibits the willingness to listen to narratives (Respondent 1c). Adding another critical reflection, respondent 1d said that with rising intensity of the conflict the use of narratives increases and the discussion dislodges from a factual basis into emotional fields.

Several considerations can be derived from this section. According to the respondents of project #1 the importance of simple messaging and the use of easy and understandable language should be considered when using narratives in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects, as well as that contents are suitable, potentially suitable or unsuitable for being communicated through narratives and that the neutrality and skill of the storyteller play an important role. The critical perceptions: limited
power of narratives in changing deadlocked opinions and the emotionalization of the discussion through narratives have to be considered as well.

4.1.4 Used and perceived narratives

In project #1 multiple complete and incomplete narratives were perceived and expressed by the respondents. According to the definition of narrative for this thesis, complete narratives include a problem, consequences and one or more solutions with an attributed interpretation, meaning or emotion. Incomplete narratives are narratives that offer some but not all of the above-mentioned compounds (e.g. a problem and consequence(s) attributed with emotions or interpretation without suggesting a solution). Beyond the investigated projects the respondents mentioned other narratives that could potentially be used in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects or were used in other wind energy projects. In appendix 3 a list of all detected narratives (i.e. complete and incomplete, used in or suggested for this project and (potentially) used in other projects) is attached. This is to offer the readers the possibility to fully immerse themselves into the stories that were and could have been told in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects. The observed narratives can be grouped into Fundamental, Vision, Technical, Financial, Allegation, Personal impact, and Environmental impact narratives. In the following, two examples (one in favour of and one against wind energy) will be presented to give a notion of the used narratives.

Example narrative in favour of wind energy

As the mediator (1a) described, storytelling during the round table was helpful for citizens to express their views and their motivations for supporting the wind energy project. Here, respondent 1a gives an example of how local residents expressed their financial, existential needs using narratives.

People spoke about recent happenings in the community and why the situation was currently difficult. Some, for example, reported that they desperately needed the money to sustain their farms, since harvests were currently bad. They said, they needed the money from the wind turbines to sustain their farms. (Respondent 1a)

Respondent 1a saw a particular value in this type of storytelling to make connections between affected citizens and foster the understanding for each other’s motives.

Example narrative against of wind energy

On the contrary side respondent 1b recalled a narrative he/she heard in the local context painting a very descriptive picture of the question of storage of electricity produced by wind turbines.

And then he starts telling stories like, ‘If one tried to store electricity in hydroelectric power plants, the whole Sauerland area would have to have a dam and then you could go by boat from Arnsberg to Brilon, because that is the amount of water you would need. […] Or Norwegian fjords – there we could save the energy and then pump it back down.’ (Respondent 1b)

The respondent perceived the narrative as highly exaggerated but assured the researchers of the high impact narratives like this have on the community.

These two narratives used in the stakeholder engagement of project #1 exemplify how narratives can be used to express views pro and contra wind energy. In these two cases they cover financial, existential needs and the storage problematic of wind energy. Beyond these two themes a full list of perceived narratives in project #1 (i.e. Fundamental, Vision, Technical, Financial, Allegation, Personal impact, and Environmental impact narratives) can be found in appendix 3.
4.2 Wind energy project #2 - Case presentation and main findings

4.2.1 Object of study

The second chosen project is located in east Germany and, in contrast to project #1, it is led by a local energy cooperative. In this project two wind turbines were added to a previously existing wind field that already accommodated multiple wind turbines owned by other organisations prior to the project (Respondent 2b). The prior history of the wind field in question highly influenced project #2, as residents were already familiar with wind energy in their surroundings and, in some cases, had particularly strong preconceived opinions (positive and negative) about the project (Respondent 2d).

Based on the example of another wind energy cooperative in a commune close by, a group of interested residents came together to discuss the possibility of communal energy production. The vision included several energy production sites including solar energy, bio-energy, hydrodynamic power, wind energy and a small district heating system with the mission to contribute to the energy transition, a local (less expensive) electricity price, possibly promoting local value creation and reaching energy autarky for the commune (Respondent 2a). The planned two wind turbines that were later realised by far accounted for the highest energy production and the highest investment volume (Respondent 2a).

After one year of working in a working team open to the public, the involved residents founded a cooperative and intensified the work towards the two wind turbines (Respondent 2b). Over the course of the next five years the energy cooperative continued to conduct public working team sessions open for interested persons or willing participants, held informal and formal community meetings informing about the project and employed other forms of stakeholder engagement (Respondent 2a). Over these years, the cooperative went through the official approval process of the development plan, recruiting more members, raising equity capital and finally investing in the construction of the two planned wind turbines (info letter of project #2). These two wind turbines are now operating and owned by the energy cooperative.

Similarly to project #1, a multitude of other data connected to the project (e.g. engagement process, distributive aspects, complexity of the topic, local political context and information/characteristics about advocates, opposition and project planners of the project) were collected in the interviews that facilitate the understanding of the context and impacted the analysis process considerably. Again, the complete mind map of project #2 will be included in appendix 6 to give readers the opportunity to immerse themselves deeper into the contextual information without deviating from the focus of this study i.e. narratives in wind energy projects and their connection to acceptance of such projects.

4.2.2 Potentials of narratives

The following section is going to present findings relating to the potential of narratives in stakeholder engagement as referred to by respondents from project #2. The potentials are categorised as applicability of narratives, factors limiting the potential as well as the use and misuse of narratives.

Application and limiting factors of narratives

All respondents from the investigated wind energy project #2 ascribed narratives the potential of application in the stakeholder engagement within wind energy. Whereas general possibility was attributed twice (Respondent 2a; Respondent 2d), the former cooperative member, responsible for public relations remembered heavy usage of narratives and anecdotes over the course of the project and explained that narratives find their way into the community (Respondent 2b). Contrary to this, the project planner asserted that hardened fronts of opposing perspectives decreased the potential use of narratives and summed up that affected citizens did not apply storytelling in the process (Respondent 2c).
Use and misuse of narratives

Regarding the use of narratives, the representative of the energy cooperative saw the potential of triggering emotions when incorporating narratives in their talks and presentations to the community (Respondent 2a). The project planner hinted towards the potential use of narratives in politics in order to explain and promote plans of energy transition, climate change, environmental sustainability, in the local context. According to him/her, politics are the only entity able to “show the right way forward” (Respondent 2c).

With regards to a potential misuse of narratives, the energy cooperative member asserted that they can evoke envy and fear within the community as well as can result in a deadlocked situation when narratives are used to accuse the opponent of evil intentions, like implying that “you only want to cash in, regardless of what the community gets from it”. He/she also warned about the danger of understating turbines’ impact through narratives when external examiners refer to the noise of turbines as being “harmless, this buzzing, it is under such and such decibel, you will hardly hear it” (Respondent 2b).

As shown above, respondents from project #2 attribute several potentials to the use of narratives in stakeholder engagement. They encompass a general applicability of narratives while also hinting at factors limiting their potential. Furthermore, it is presented what potentials the respondents devote to the use and misuse of narratives.

4.2.3 Considerations for narratives

The following section presents the considerations for narratives referred to by the respondents related to project #2. Most of the themes/considerations were mentioned by one energy cooperative member (Respondent 2b) who, due to his/her position dealing with public relations, was especially knowledgeable about the project and the importance of communicating information in general.

Generally, when transmitting content through narratives the use of simple messaging was perceived as essential (Respondent 2b). Potential content for narratives in wind energy projects was categorised as unsuitable or suitable (e.g. “acoustic noise”) (Respondent 2c).

Now follow several considerations brought forward by respondent 2b: corresponding to using simple messaging, the use of a language fitting to the target audience was mentioned as being important. According to him/her narratives have a tendency to be exaggerating when used consecutively. This was exemplified by a story about bird migration in the project area where “an ever-increasing number as well as size of storks” appeared in every renarration. Next, he/she described facts to be more persuasive/effective than narratives that evoke emotions. This approach, without articulating, was the energy cooperative’s “essential tactic” that proved successful albeit acknowledging this could have been “simply luck”. He/she constituted that the difference between fact and fiction/lies is increasingly difficult to see when narratives are used, resulting in a mix of “circulating conspiracy theories, anecdotes, simple lies and fake news not possible to distinguish from each other”. It follows that supposedly all storytellers always have a (hidden) agenda: “People don’t put anecdotes into the world not because they don’t have anything better to do, but because each anecdote has its motivation. There is definitely something behind it”. Additionally, when storytellers encounter opposing storytellers, the discussion becomes more and more emotional, potentially leading to (violent) conflict: “first with arguments and then with fists”. Referring back to the experience he/she made in other ecological community projects, similar mechanics of using narratives as allegations are prevalent.

Lastly, only Respondent 2d evaluated the power of narratives to influence people/increase acceptance as non-existent. Together with this evaluation, the above findings present the considerations the
respondents related to project #2 ascribe to narratives. Those include the use of simple language and significance of the target audience, constraints regarding the suitability of content for narratives as well as rather negative elements involving hidden agendas of storytellers, using narratives as a mechanic for allegation or to distribute lies or fake news and the stimulation of (violent) emotions spurred by narratives.

4.2.4 Used and perceived narratives

In project #2, the narratives found by the authors speaking in favour of wind energy in a wider context or the project itself were classified into the following clusters: Fundamental, Vision, Technical and Financial narrative. Narratives generally or specifically contra wind energy fall into the clusters Allegation, Personal impact, Environmental impact as well as Financial narrative. Following the approach of project #1, further narratives mentioned or referred to in project #2 can be reviewed in appendix 4. Now following are two examples – one pro and one contra wind energy – of narratives used or perceived throughout the stakeholder engagement of wind energy project #2 as stated by participants.

Example narrative in favour of wind energy

Respondent 2d reflected back on what the representatives of the energy cooperative mentioned in the beginning of the engagement process when referring to a neighbouring village.

‘Well, look at this village’ - I don’t recall the name of the village, not far from here, close to *** - ‘yes, this is a village that has five wind turbines and they are fully energy autarkic. And they have this pellet incineration plant and make everything themselves.’

(Respondent 2d)

This reference was made by leaders of the energy cooperative in order to convince community members of owning a small wind farm and being self-sufficient.

Example narrative against wind energy

Next to several other allegation narratives that came up in the realm of narratives against wind project #2, respondent 2b specifically recalls the following one:

‘You only want to have that thing because you want to cash-in…no matter what the community around gets from it. You wanna make cash. This electrician who pushed himself forward to support the project, all he wants is to lay the wires. He only wants to earn money.’ Those allegation stories are terrifying. (Respondent 2b)

The above narrative refers to an allegation accusing a community member of selfishly acting and speaking in favour of the project because of arising job opportunities resulting out of the wind energy project.

The above narratives used in the stakeholder engagement of project #2 indicate how narratives can be used in order to express views in favour of and against wind energy. On the one side, a vision narrative is shown that was used to inspire a decentralized energy production for the local community. On the other side, an allegation narrative was used to express one’s perception of financial motives of wind energy supporters. Beyond these two narratives a full list of used/perceived narratives in project #2 (i.e. Fundamental, Vision, Technical, Financial, Allegation, Personal impact, and Environmental impact narratives) can be found in appendix 4.
5. Analysis

In the following chapter, (elements of) information as well as the main findings concerning perceptions of narratives will be analysed. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section will present and analyse the information conveyed in wind energy projects. In order to give a comprehensive overview, the findings in project #1, project #2 and the literature will be consolidated in one table whilst still maintaining a clear attribution to the source of where the respective data came from. This list will represent the answer to research question 1. Subsequently, respondents’ perceptions on the importance of such information will be analysed in order to answer research question 1.1. In the second section, the main findings concerning perceptions of narratives will be analysed one by one: positive and negative potentials of narratives, considerations for the use of narratives and content and influence on acceptance of narratives. In each of these sections, both projects will be compared and contrasted while relating the gathered data to the literature. Originating from this analysis, research questions 2, 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 will be answered.

5.1 Information

5.1.1 Information conveyed in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects #1 and #2

In an effort to complement the list of information found in the reviewed literature and presented in section 2.2 through primary data collection, the conducted interviews contained questions asking about the elements of information that were transmitted throughout the project life cycle. Thus, the below list (Table 3) now encompasses and clearly illustrates elements of information found in the literature as well as information mentioned by the respondents as occurred and/or perceived in the two investigated wind energy projects.

The list encompasses the following categories: Nature conservation/Environmental protection, General technical information/possibilities, Immissions, Financial aspects and Participation process. In addition, there are elements that do not fit in either of the aforementioned categories and thus are displayed as individual items/elements: General usefulness of wind energy, Tourism and Communal benefits.

Generally, it can be constituted that the respondents referred to a higher number of elements of information, while the literature remains on a rather thematic level. This thematic view is expressed through terms such as adequate, timely or objective. Relating to this, a difference between literature and the gathered data, for example, is visible when comparing the impact on birds. In this topic of interest, the respondents mention several types of birds prevalent in their area. Here, the reason for the discrepancy between thematic observance by the literature and individual consideration by the ‘affected’ community can be explained by the specificities of the local context.

Albeit some of the discrepancies between literature and the gathered data can be attributed to such local specificities, an interestingly high number of additional elements relevant for the respondents can be found in the below table. Some of those were also mentioned by several of the respondents, indicating a certain interest on such elements. This, for example, applies to Place and build-up of access roads which was an articulated concern, or rather by-product, occurring as part of the deployment of new wind turbines. This then stood in relation to Reforestation and Restoration of natural habitats for birds. While Infrasound was mentioned by the majority of the respondents, it is assumed that literature incorporates this as part of acoustic noise.

This list constitutes a comprehensive, yet non-exhaustive collection of information that ought to be considered by actors working in the field in order to have a reference point for properly processing
and transparently sharing the adequate information relevant to the locally affected community. Literature contributes mostly thematic as well as overarching characteristic terms like adequate, accurate and objective. The list also serves as an answer to research question 1: What elements of information are transported in stakeholder engagement according to the literature and mentioned by stakeholders in investigated wind energy projects in Germany?

Table 3 List of information including literature findings and results of primary data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information in wind energy projects</th>
<th>Literature source</th>
<th>Respondents from project #1</th>
<th>Respondents from project #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adequate/appropriate</td>
<td>Gross, 2007/Simcock, 2016</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Gross, 2007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of the correct scope/sufficient</td>
<td>Gross, 2007/Simcock, 201</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Gross, 2007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available</td>
<td>Gross, 2007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accurate</td>
<td>Simcock, 2016</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of transparency</td>
<td>b, d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature conservation/environmental impact</td>
<td>a, b, c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Monitoring authority (who and how?)</td>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Species conservation</td>
<td>b, d, f</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Impact on birds</td>
<td>Scherhaufer et al., 2017</td>
<td>a, b, e, f</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Real sites</td>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bird migration</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>a, c, d</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Migrating storks</td>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Migrating cranes</td>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Butterfly migration</td>
<td>d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bat population</td>
<td>Scherhaufer et al., 2017</td>
<td>a, f</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bats</td>
<td>c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Amphibians</td>
<td>c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Impact on scenery</td>
<td>Scherhaufer et al., 2017</td>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How much forest has to be cut down?</td>
<td>c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reforestation</td>
<td>d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Restoration of natural habitat for birds</td>
<td>d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Impact on ground water or drainage basin through &quot;massive compression&quot;</td>
<td>f</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Remaining concrete</td>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General technical information/possibilities</td>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Number of planned turbines</td>
<td>Simcock, 2016/Scherhaufer et al., 2017</td>
<td>d</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Location/Place of the turbines</td>
<td>Simcock, 2016/Scherhaufer et al., 2017</td>
<td>a, e</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Height of turbines</td>
<td>Simcock, 2016/Scherhaufer et al., 2017</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Type of turbines</td>
<td>c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Energy capacity</td>
<td>e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- # of households to be supplied</td>
<td>e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Energy storage</td>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Wind measurement method</td>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Wind speed assessment</td>
<td>d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Place and build-up of access roads</td>
<td>b, c, e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Expected construction traffic – place</td>
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<td>- Vast usage of concrete</td>
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<td>- Regulation about distance of turbines to housing area</td>
<td>b, c</td>
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<td>Immissions/Impact on Humans</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Acoustic noise</td>
<td>Scherhaufer et al., 2017</td>
<td>a, b, c, d</td>
<td>b, c, d</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Stop-motion mechanism existent</td>
<td>b</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Switching into lower load category to reduce noise possible</td>
<td>c</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Ensuring noise to stay within legal limits through proof measurements</td>
<td>b</td>
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<td>- Direction of wind, affecting noise levels</td>
<td>d</td>
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<td>- Change blade angle to reduce noise</td>
<td>d</td>
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<td>- Infrasound</td>
<td>c, e, f</td>
<td>a, r</td>
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<td>- Visibility (from where can you see the turbines?)</td>
<td>c, d</td>
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<td>- Shadow</td>
<td>Scherhaufer et al., 2017</td>
<td>c, d, e, f</td>
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<td>- Discoloration effect</td>
<td>e</td>
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<td>- Shading module - turning off turbine when excessive shade impact on neighbors appears</td>
<td>c</td>
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<td>- Protection measures</td>
<td>d</td>
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<td>- Health impairments</td>
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<td>- Light emission</td>
<td>Scherhaufer et al., 2017</td>
<td>b</td>
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<td>- Demand-controlled night light emission function</td>
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<td>- Ice shedding</td>
<td>Scherhaufer et al., 2017</td>
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<td>Financial aspects</td>
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<td>- Who is the investor?</td>
<td>Wüstenhagen et al., 2007</td>
<td>a, b</td>
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<td>- Financial benefits of the investor</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Financial participation of citizens (through energy cooperative (e.g. Bürgerwindpark))</td>
<td>Wüstenhagen et al., 2007</td>
<td>a, b, d</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Outlook by citizens on financial profits (&quot;what’s in it to me?&quot;)</td>
<td>Scherhaufer et al., 2017</td>
<td>d, f</td>
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<td>- Interest rates on investments</td>
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<td>- Forecasted revenue</td>
<td>a</td>
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<td>- Potential loss of substantial value of affected citizens’ real estate</td>
<td>b</td>
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<td>- Special (inexpensive) energy price for local community</td>
<td>d</td>
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<td>Participation process</td>
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<td>- Degree of community influence on the project</td>
<td>Wüstenhagen et al., 2007</td>
<td>a, b</td>
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<td>- Information about the decision maker of the degree of community influence</td>
<td>Wüstenhagen et al., 2007</td>
<td>a, b, d</td>
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<td>- Process steps</td>
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<td>- Legal framework</td>
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<td>General usefulness of wind energy</td>
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<td>- Tourism</td>
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<td>- Communal benefits</td>
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5.1.2 Importance of conveyed information

This section deals with the perception of interviewed stakeholders on the information discussed and presented in the prior section. Asked about the importance the stakeholders would ascribe to the individual elements of information, a clear ranking or prioritization of information was not revealed by the respondents. However, also considering the frequency of stated information relevant for and transported in the stakeholder engagement throughout the investigated projects, the respondents referred to a few elements independently of each other which will form the basis for the authors to provide an answer to research question 1.1: How is the importance of these elements of information perceived amongst stakeholders in selected wind energy projects in Germany?

What becomes visible when looking at the list of information is a repeated mentioning across both projects of acoustic noise and shadow emitted from wind turbines, the impact on birds as well as conservation of nature/species in general. Opportunities of financial participation for citizens were interestingly only articulated repeatedly in project #1. This may be explained by the fundamentally different starting position of sharing financial benefits/profits within an energy cooperative in project #2. However, that does not mean that financial aspects were not a point of interest for the stakeholders in project #2. This becomes obvious when looking at how respondents referred to financial aspects in a more general, project-related sense or even build monetary issues into the formulation of narratives: either in narratives of visionary/financial nature on the pro or allegation/financial nature on the contra side of wind energy as shown in 4.1.4 and 4.2.4 Perceived narratives.

In general, the conducted data match the literature findings of relevant information in wind energy projects (Gross, 2007; Scherhaufer et al., 2017; Simcock, 2016; Wüstenhagen et al., 2007). This information represents one necessary element to fulfil principles of procedural/distributive justice as proposed by the investigated literature (see 2.2 Information in wind energy projects). In addition to this, the respondents provided a more profound picture as well as interest in specific details relating to their project. This is in line with the authors’ assumption that an ‘all-encompassing’ list of elements of information will never fit every wind energy project, because every project is undertaken in a different geographical and cultural context and, therefore, the valuable information is inevitably going to be different according to the respective context.

Acoustic noise was (further) specified by some respondents as infrasound, making a more precise connection to the potentially negative impact on health which may be attributed to wind turbines. In this point, the disagreement about the state of scientific research findings in medicine/psychology became obvious. While it was explained that there are “no scientific measures that can reliably detect that [infrasound]” (Respondent 2c), respondent 1e referred to “an equal number of studies that say this is a huge problem” causing a “wind-turbine-syndrome”. This leaves an unclear and definitely polarizing factual basis due to contradictory research and portrays the dilemma of scientifically grounded facts and, equally, facts by external examiners – “Everyone who needs a study, commissions a study and gets the result, that he/she wants”(Respondent 1e).

The above presented elements of information seemed most important to the respondents and were articulated by both groups, the rather-transmitting and the rather-receiving respondents. Respondents who are classified here to be rather-transmitting are project planners and representatives of the energy cooperative. Respondents on the rather-receiving end of information are found in the local representatives as well as nature conservation organisation. Nevertheless, it is important to constitute that also the rather-receiving actors contributed/shared information, which at least encompassed
subjectively perceived fears and concerns (see appendices 5 and 6) that stand in close connection to the relevant information.

To sum up, research question 1.1 can be answered as follows: The stakeholders from the investigated wind energy projects do not attribute particular importance to selective elements of information when being directly asked about it. However, based on the frequency of articulated elements of information as well as the overall references made and narratives used regarding certain aspects prevalent in the examined wind energy projects, one can constitute that acoustic noise (including infrasound), shadow, the impact on birds and conservation of nature/species as well as opportunities of financial participation for citizens are most relevant for the interviewed stakeholders.

5.2 Narratives

In the following section the findings concerning respondents’ perceptions of narratives will be analysed. The findings will be compared and contrasted between the two projects while linking them to the theoretical framework. The section is divided into the following parts: positive and negative potentials of narratives, considerations for the use of narratives and narratives – content and impact on acceptance. Each section will be concluded with a short summary which is simultaneously the answer to the respective research question (RQ 2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3).

5.2.1 Positive and negative potentials of narratives

Across both examined projects the possibility of applying narratives in the stakeholder engagement and beyond was mentioned for both sides, either in favour of or against wind energy. In project #1, according to respondent 1a and 1b, narratives were perceived as being potentially able to increase the acceptance of the project in numerous ways: increasing the quality of dialogue, potential reduction of envy, more effective information provision, increased understanding as well as reuniting divided communities. However, potential negative effects of using narratives were expressed as well: emotionalisation of the discussion and stoking envy and fear.

Increasing the quality of dialogue

As mentioned by Dütschke et al. (2017), a public dialogue in wind energy projects might offer fruitful feedback for the project developer. Likewise, Eskerod and Huemann (2013) explain the advantages of the management for stakeholders approach as mutual value creation and the sharing of information and ideas. Respondent 1a explained that, through the use of narratives by citizens, an education of project planners can take place. Through that, the project planners realise the importance of direct interaction with stakeholders. He/she also stated that narratives then offer the potential to evoke interaction and enrich the dialogue. This stands in positive connection to what Dütschke et al. (2017) and Eskerod and Huemann (2013) propose as the outcome of public dialogue and a management for stakeholder approach – fruitful feedback for the project developer and mutual value creation. While this conclusion is in accordance with some respondents, especially in project #1, the respondents of project #2 described less optimistic experiences. Respondent 2c, for example, stated that he/she saw the stakeholder engagement from a standpoint of defending and attacking rather than from one of mutually beneficial exchanges. Respondent 2d recalled dialogues in the project planning phase: “Yes, we had conversations, but they ended in yelling within a short time.” These two respondents were not of the impression that storytelling could have helped the process.
Potential reduction of envy

Langer et al. (2016) describe the problematic of envy due to an unfair distribution of benefits of wind energy project. As elucidated by respondent 1a, narratives were used to convey personal feelings and motives about supporting wind energy projects (see 4.1.4 Used and perceived narratives). Through using narratives to convey feelings and motives, a higher, more understandable transparency was provided. Respondent 1c saw particular value in learning about people’s honest motives which the stakeholder engagement brought about. Possibly this could lower envy debates by fostering transparency and understanding.

More effective information provision

As stated by inter alia Gross (2007), the access to information plays an important role in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects. However, the sole access to information about wind energy projects (e.g. impact on birds) through publicly accessible expert opinions may not be sufficient or suitable to reach every concerned resident. Respondent 1b conceded that the distribution of knowledge and information to citizens presented a challenge. In line with the findings of Sundin et al. (2018), the findings of project #1 and #2 confirm the potential of using narratives to convey information in a more digestible format.

Increasing understanding and reuniting divided communities

Respondent 1a depicted the possibility of narratives to evoke interaction leading to a richer dialogue where people feel comfortable to share their stories. The then shared stories were seen to increase the understanding of (opposing) listeners consequently leading to negotiation and a decrease in conflict – as also found by Sandercock (2003) – as well as leading to compromise and acceptance, equally described by Quick (2018). The effect of storytelling on listeners’ understanding leading to higher receptivity of opposing views that Sandercock (2003), Miller et al. (2015) and Quick (2018) observed, was particularly perceived in project #1. Here, narrative dialogue “reunited” a divided community and brought forth verbal exchange where silent grudge used to prevail (Respondent 1a; Respondent 1c). In contrast, respondent 2c experienced “hardened fronts” in project #2, that “made people deaf for narratives”, even though respondent 2b asserted that narratives “find their way into the community.” The data shows that the respondents had differing perceptions about the possibility of narratives to increase the receptivity of opposing views. This could possibly be due to different intensities in conflict in and/or different level of advancement of project #1 and #2.

Beyond the stakeholder engagement of a specific wind energy project, respondent 2c saw particular demand for narratives used by politicians to connect the energy transition and climate change to local contexts (e.g. droughts, hot summers and forest fires in Brandenburg). These narratives would not just connect current events to the local context but also serve as future-oriented narratives (Throgmorton 1996 in Sandercock, 2003). They could shape the discourse and the culture of people (explained earlier as constitutive character), potentially leading to more positive initial mindsets towards wind energy.

Emotionalisation of the discussion and stoking envy and fear.

With all these positive potentials of narratives in stakeholder engagement for wind energy projects being presented, it has to be mentioned that, as perceived by the respondents, what actually took place in project #1 and #2 in terms of narrative usage was seen as predominantly negative. Respondent 1a still saw the potential to move people and react upon the expressed concerns, as also Sundin et al.
(2018) found. As articulated in the theoretical framework (2.3 Narratives and stakeholder engagement – origin, explanation, relation), the constitute and especially the persuasive character of narratives imply ethical considerations. This is of particular relevance because respondents 2b and 2a stated that wind energy opponents knew how to stoke fear and envy (Respondent 2b) and emotionally stir up the community (Respondent 2a). On top of that, respondent 1c perceived that emotions outweigh facts in decision making. This may lead to a particularly high risk of being susceptible to the deliberate, potentially manipulative (mis-)use of narratives by wind-energy-opponents. In light of the discussion above, it is not unambiguous what to count as ‘misuse’ of narratives and what to count as ‘use’. The question arises who or what decides which narrative is ethically justifiable. In the respondents’ statements it became clear that both sides accused each other of using narratives to deceive and persuade the audience for their own benefits.

Given the illustration of the findings and their analysis, it is now possible to answer research question 2 as follows: According to the interviewed stakeholders of two wind energy projects in Germany, narratives bear the potential to increase acceptance through (1) increasing the quality of dialogue, (2) potentially reducing envy, (3) disseminating information more effectively, (4) increasing understanding as well as potentially moving people and (5) reuniting divided communities. However, the use of narratives was also seen as bearing negative potentials: (1) emotionalisation of the discussion and (2) stoking envy and fear.

5.2.2 Considerations for the use of narratives

The following sections aims to analyse the basic considerations for the use of narratives as revealed by the respondents, find and discuss similarities/differences across the two examined projects as well as relate the findings to the literature explored in the theoretical framework. The analysis of considerations comprises limited utilisability, the importance of the audience and its diverse/peculiar characteristics, suitability of content and understandable language as well as an examination of fiction, facts and trust, before it ends with the neutrality and skills of the storyteller. This is then used to provide an answer to research question 2.1.

**Limited utilisability of narratives**

Quick (2018) considers narratives to be a valuable tool due to its capacity of persuasion as well as transmitting information enriched with emotions and meaning in stakeholder engagement. However, within the investigated wind energy projects, the data reveals that some respondents constitute limited power of narratives to change people’s mind. In this regard, respondent 1e stated that initial, negative attitudes towards the project did not change after the use of narratives (Respondent 1e). A similar assessment was made in project #2 by respondent 2d arguing that citizens were not influenced by narratives. This notion of limited utilisability seemed to be enforced when deadlocked opinions existed among the stakeholders who (already) “have a predefined picture in mind” and where, for example, a vision narrative illustrating beneficial developments would not change their view (Respondent 1c). However, as shown in the section before, the potential of narratives to be applied in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects is seen by multiple respondents and in literature.

**Importance of the audience and underlying values**

Both of the examined projects reveal that the audience is a crucial element to be considered. This is in accordance with Quick (2018) saying that the narratives need to fit not only the context but also the audience. Above that, it is especially relevant because each member of the audience, i.e. local stakeholder, has individual basic assumptions and values that influence the way narratives are perceived (Sandercook, 2003; Bruner, 1991). Relating this to the vast complexity of the topic – accounting for
both, the examined wind energy projects as well as the topic in general (see appendices 5 and 6) – it
determines how delicately narratives ought to be constructed, “meeting and respecting the diversity
of the recipients” (Respondent 2b). In this line of thought, underlying values noticed in the interviews
were compiled throughout the analysis process. It became clear to the authors that these (perceived)
underlying values – within the respondents or other community members as mentioned by the
respondents – may have influenced behaviours and shaped stakeholders’ perceptions of narratives. For
example, out of a community perspective, underlying values may be expressed as a preconceived
disbelief in the project planner employed at an energy firm (Respondents 1a, 1b, 2c), an inner resistance
because a hidden agenda was assumed in the communication (Respondent 1a) or different forms of
fear (e.g. of pollution, degradation of the surrounding living environment, fear of future
development/change) (Respondents 1a, 1c, 1d, 2d). Fear was specifically referred to by Respondent 1c
as inhibiting the receptivity for narratives, forming another consideration for the use of narratives.

**Suitability of content and use of simple language**

Other considerations that both projects share are the characteristics attributed to narratives regarding
content and simplicity of language. The respondents referred to content as either being (potentially)
suitable or unsuitable for narratives. Putting this in relation to Ryan’s (2007) classification that a
narrative is the vehicle for transporting the content, one can constitute that the cargo may not always
fit the vehicle. While suitable content encompasses, for example, noise or setting the overall debate
on global/nationwide energy transition in a local context (Respondents 1b, 1c, 2c), unsuitable content
was referred to as the “hard facts”, like conservation of species or reduced tree population due to
access road construction (Respondent 1b). Comparing this to the information considered in literature
as to be relevant in wind energy projects – for example, participation possibilities for (part of) the
community or acoustic noise (Scherhaufer et al., 2017) – the use of narratives is only relevant for a
limited number of topics and corresponding information.

Adding another consideration, the aspect of simple messaging can make it very difficult for the actors,
predominantly project planners and wind energy advocates, to maneuver throughout the moments of
engagement and purposely encode meaning in language (Hermville, 2016). This results in the necessity
to make the right selection of content/information and find the right degree of simplicity of language –
e.g. by using examples as proposed by respondent 1d. This has the potential to make the narrative
catchy, yet plausible to help the audience to somewhat comprehend the complexity of the topic. No
doubt, the complexity of the topic wind energy hinders verbalisation of simple messages/narratives.

**Examination of fiction vs. facts and trust**

What should also be considered is the difficulty in differentiating between fact and fiction or even lies.
This was referred to by respondent 2b who mentioned the risk of being surrounded by a mixture of
circulating truths, conspiracy theories or fake news which is more and more visible in today’s socio-
cultural and political context – a complex phenomenon in itself that is/should be researched. Still, it
should be noted that the distinct separation between logos and mythos as shaped by Aristotle and Plato
distinguishing between truth/facts and fiction/stories (Fisher, 1985) seems increasingly difficult. Trust,
therefore, takes on an important role as underlying factor for social acceptance in wind energy projects
in general and for each individually affected stakeholder. As shown by Walker et al. (2014), trust is
essential for allowing interaction with the community to occur in the first place and substantially forms
the stakeholder engagement and its progression. Interestingly however, none of the respondents
specifically articulated trust as being a consideration for narratives. Nevertheless, as trust was
repeatedly mentioned by respondents in various contexts as revealed in the data – both in a positive
as well as negative sense (see appendices 5 and 6) – it may be regarded as a fundamental aspect that
resonates with all other considerations for narratives. This can then also be evaluated to match the meaning of trust in relation to procedural and distributive justice for the overall acceptance of wind energy projects within the local community (see Community acceptance in 2.1.2).

**Neutrality and skill of the storyteller**

In the realm of trust and credibility, attributes of the storyteller, in particular the importance of his/her neutrality, were also mentioned as being important. Especially project #1 delivered interesting insights regarding the aspect of having a neutral narrator, specifically in the energy sector. However, acknowledging this may be impossible as people are said to always come with an agenda due to being associated with a specific company, field of science or others, this inevitably creates a defensive demeanour amongst participants (Respondent 1a; Respondent 2b). Next are skills of the storyteller: one supposedly needs to have decent technical know-how and rhetorical skills that may build up over time to tell a good story (Respondent 1d). Furthermore, and especially noteworthy, varying levels of skill are associated with participants of wind energy projects. The opposing actors are seen to be more skilled compared to the advocates of wind energy (Respondent 1b). The aforementioned aspects concerning the storyteller are surprisingly not considered in the reviewed literature, neither in literature regarding social acceptance in wind energy nor in literature about narratives in stakeholder engagement. Investigating narratives in wind energy as part of a first scientific work may explain this. The authors are unsure however, why the researchers exploring narratives in stakeholder engagement presented in this thesis did not refer to the role and attributes connected to the storyteller.

The above compilation of explanations on considerations will now be consolidated in order to answer research question 2.1: According to the perceptions of the respondents, what needs to be considered when using narratives in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects is (1) the diversity and peculiarity of each member of the audience respecting his/her (potential) underlying values, (2) that only selective content/(elements of) information is/are suitable for narratives, (3) that narratives should be constructed using simple, understandable language despite the complex nature of the topic, (4) that the storyteller should take and remain on a neutral stance while having comprehensive technical know-how and rhetorical skills and (5) that trust ought to be seen as a fundamental aspect that resonates with all other considerations for narratives.

On a rather negative note, it should also be considered that the differentiation between scientific/factual truth and fake news is increasingly polarizing the socio-cultural and political discourse which entails the dangerous potential to further fuel the intense discussion of opposing sides prevalent in wind energy. Additionally, it was shown that narratives have limited utilisability when stakeholders already have a prefabricated picture in mind, resulting in deadlocked opinions that can hardly be cracked.

**5.2.3 Content found in narratives**

Combining the identified examples of narratives enables to answer research question 2.2. The content that appeared in narratives used in the investigated wind energy projects comprises, in project #1: (1) the trade-off between conventional energy production (nuclear energy, coal-fired power) and renewable energy (particularly wind energy), (2) geological and legal requirements for geographic location of wind energy site, (3) noise, (4) financial needs/motives, (5) the energy storage problematic of wind energy, (6) free energy suppression as an alternative energy source, (7) wind turbines syndrome, (8) feelings of encirclement, and (9) nature conservation;

and in project #2: (1) energy transition and climate change, (2) the problematic of finite resources (Peak-Oil), (3) the vision about communal energy supply, citizen participation, sustainability and
inexpensive energy, (4) local value creation, (5) measures to influence the approval process of wind turbines, (6) allegation of dishonesty, greed, corruption, and betrayal by the church, individuals and local politicians, (7) people moving away because of wind turbines, (8) the decapitation of migrating birds through wind turbines, and (9) substantial loss in property values.

Beyond the narratives that occurred in project #1 and #2, respondents mentioned further examples of narratives with different contents, that, in their view, could have been used in the two projects and/or could potentially be used in wind energy projects in general. A full list of all narratives containing all mentioned narratives can be found in appendices 3 and 4.

5.2.4 Narratives’ impact on acceptance

In the following, the above identified narratives will be analysed, leading to explain the perceived impact of narratives on stakeholders’ acceptance (RQ 2.3). Links to the literature were especially seen in the uncertainty of what defines a narrative, the authority and the constitutive character of and the conveyed interpretation through narratives. The respondents described 23 narratives in total that were used in project #1 (9) and project #2 (14). In the interviews, respondents gave several insights that relate to the discussed literature in the theoretical framework. The disunity in what defines a narrative and the differentiation between facts and fiction became clear. Examples of narratives given by respondents exemplify their constitutive character, their authority and how interpretations are conveyed on top of facts.

Disunity in defining the term ‘narrative’

Throughout all ten respondents, a general uncertainty about the definition of the term ‘narrative’ became clear. Narrative appeared to be a term that is usually explained by gut feeling rather than by precise, defining characteristics. Accordingly, there was a disunity in how a narrative was understood and therefore which examples could be classified as narratives and which could not – much like the academic discussion struggles to present one, conclusive definition of narratives. Furthermore, two respondents (Respondent 1f; Respondent 2d) (subconsciously) made the distinction of logos and mythos (facts and fiction), as firstly done by Aristotle and Plato, and allocated narratives in the world of fiction, attributing the meaning of a tall tale to narratives. The other respondents had a more neutral perspective on the word narrative and the mediator of project #1 (Respondent 1a) had a particularly extensive stance on narratives corresponding closer with Fisher’s (1985) narrative paradigm, acknowledging the narrative way of expression. Interestingly, the respondents who saw narratives as tall tales asserted that they did not use them – that all their voiced concerns and fears were true and not fictive. Especially these respondents were, as observed by the authors, using many narratives (often incomplete – e.g. not offering a solution) in their descriptions. Possibly, they took this denying stance because the word narrative – in their understanding – has a negative connotation.

Interpretations through narratives and their constitutive character and authority

Throgmorton (1996; in Sandercock 2003) explained the constitutive character of future-oriented narratives, i.e. shaping the discourse and culture of a community. In both projects, the vision type narrative was backed up by several examples. Encompassing contents like sustainable development, contribution to climate protection, autarky and local value creation, these narratives were perceived as having an impact on shaping the discussion within the community (Respondent 1b; Respondent 1c; Respondent 2a; Respondent 2d). A second characteristic that Throgmorton (1996; in Sandercock, 2003) attributes to narratives is the need of authority – i.e. reliable proof composed into a convincing argument. This was described, for example, in project #2 where the leader of the energy cooperative
(Respondent 1a) said that they used the Peak-Oil study as reliable proof to create their argument for promoting the planned wind turbines.

In all the observed narratives, the attached meaning or interpretation described by Hermwille (2016, p. 4; based on Gadinger et al., 2014) was detected. The researchers often experienced the re-narration of used narratives containing an underlying ‘tone’, such as desperateness or humour through exaggeration (see 4.1.4 Narratives used in wind energy project #1). This underlying tone may determine the direction of where the narrative is heading for and how it is perceived by the listeners. Very subtle, attributed meanings can be communicated that might sink into the listener’s subconsciousness.

**The impact of narratives on stakeholders’ acceptance**

Multiple potentials of narratives capable of increasing acceptance were mentioned and basic considerations as well as examples were elucidated by the respondents. However, the gathered data result in the following answer to research question 2.3: Despite the usage of narratives in the stakeholder engagement throughout the project, the interviewed stakeholders did not perceive a change in regard to their acceptance of the respective wind energy project.

Beyond their own acceptance it was stated that in both projects the use of narratives in the stakeholder engagement did not, or only in very few cases, change local stakeholders’ acceptance of the respective wind energy project. What should be mentioned here is that the very limited perceived effect of narratives on local stakeholders’ perceptions of the projects could be due to timing and lack of intentional use of narratives. It was repeatedly mentioned that narratives could not or only very limited alter already made up minds. Therefore, as proposed in 5.2.1 Positive and negative potentials of narratives, an early use of narratives to take advantage of the constitutive character of narratives (Throgmorton 1996 in Sandercock, 2003) might bear the potential to create stakeholders’ acceptance of wind energy rather than trying to change refusal into acceptance later on. Secondly, in neither project the use of narratives was purposely decided upon. In project #1 it was not taken into consideration at all and in project #2 it was deliberately not used to not further emotionalise the discussion that was already being stoked by project opponents (Respondent 2b). In both cases, a well-designed ‘narrative strategy’ might have given better results in increasing local stakeholders’ acceptance of the respective project.
6. Discussion and conclusion

This thesis first reviewed literature on the topics under investigation - social acceptance and information in wind energy projects as well as narratives in stakeholder engagement. Then it performed an exploratory study on two different wind energy projects in Germany. Stakeholders were identified and interviewed regarding their perceptions of information as well as narratives conveyed throughout the stakeholder engagement within their respective project. The respondents’ statements were analysed using IPA to understand their sense-making of the given situation and the phenomena under investigation – (elements of) information and narratives in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects.

Guided by the research questions that support the aim of this study, a number of results have been compiled in the process of this thesis. First, a comprehensive list of (elements of) information conveyed in the investigated wind energy projects (#1 and #2) and mentioned in the literature has been generated (see Table 3) to answer the first research question (RQ1). Second, in the analysis of respondents’ statements regarding the communicated information in wind energy projects #1 and #2 it was found that no particular importance was attributed to specific pieces of information (RQ 1.1). Nevertheless, acoustic noise (including infrasound), shadow, the impact on birds and conservation of nature/species in general as well as opportunities of financial participation for citizens were mentioned most often and thus, can be deemed as most relevant for the interviewed stakeholders.

Third, the main findings regarding the perceived potentials of narratives used in stakeholder engagement of wind energy projects in Germany (RQ 2) and the analysis thereof allowed to attribute the potential to increase acceptance through narratives by: (1) increasing the quality of dialogue, (2) potentially reducing envy, (3) disseminating information more effectively, (4) increasing understanding and potentially moving people as well as (5) reuniting divided communities. However, the use of narratives also bears negative potentials: (1) emotionalisation of the discussion and (2) stoking envy and fear.

Fourth, central findings and the answer to research question 2.1 were considerations regarding the usage of narratives in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects, according to the respondents. These considerations presented themselves as follows: (1) the diversity and peculiarity of each member of the audience respecting his/her (potential) underlying values, (2) that only selective content/(elements of) information is/are suitable for narratives, (3) that narratives should be constructed using simple, understandable language, (4) that the storyteller should take and remain on a neutral stance while having comprehensive technical know-how and rhetorical skills and (5) that trust ought to be seen as a fundamental aspect that resonates with all other considerations for narratives.

Fifth, 23 narratives in the respondents’ statements were identified as having been used in the stakeholder engagement of project #1 and project #2. A compilation of these narratives (RQ 2.2) shows that they cover fundamental, technical, visionary and financial contents as well as a personal impact, environmental impact and allegations (see appendices 3 and 4).

Sixth, regarding the impact the used narratives had on local stakeholders’ acceptance of the respective project (RQ 2.3), the results showed that the respondents did not perceive a change of mind due to the use of narratives in the stakeholder engagement of wind energy projects #1 and #2. However, as explained in 5.2.4 Narratives’ impact on acceptance, in neither of the two projects narratives purposely were used to increase acceptance. Based on the potentials of narratives mentioned by the respondents, the authors would argue that with a well-designed ‘narrative strategy’ the impact of narratives on local stakeholders’ acceptance could be increased.
In light of the findings and the answers to the research questions as stated above, the two-fold aim of this study has been fulfilled. First, a list of (elements of) information considered as relevant for transmission in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects has been compiled based on the academic literature (see, table 1). This list was then complemented with case-specific information from project #1 and #2, resulting in a comprehensive but non-exhaustive list (see table 3). In addition, the attributed importance to these elements of information has been investigated (see RQ 1.1). Second, the potentials (RQ 2) of and considerations (RQ 2.1) for narratives in this context were explored. Furthermore, it was investigated which content (possibly relating to the found elements of information) is transported via narratives (RQ 2.2) and how these narratives are used (in favour of and against wind energy) in stakeholder engagement in the investigated wind energy projects in Germany, potentially impacting local stakeholders’ acceptance (RQ 2.3). Beyond the aim, contextual information and more examples of narratives were gathered. The contextual information of the projects indicates the complexity of the topic (see Appendices 5 and 6). The collection of potentially applicable narratives in favour of and against wind energy can be found in appendices 3 and 4.

The exploration of narratives as a further tool to increase acceptance (e.g. Gross, 2007; Wüstenhagen et al., 2007; Scherhaufer et al., 2017) offers one more instrument to operationalise procedural justice, thereby expanding the knowledge about acceptance in wind energy projects and the literature on the use of narratives in stakeholder engagement. With the investigation of inter alia information transmission through narratives in this context, this thesis represents a link between literature on social acceptance, specifically community acceptance, of wind energy projects, and literature on the use of narratives in stakeholder engagement. The new insights originating from this research may allow practitioners to gain a better understanding of how to conduct stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects more effectively.

The results of this thesis support several findings from previous research. The importance of trust as considered by Wüstenhagen et al. (2007) in the triangle for social acceptance on renewable energy as well as for the engagement process as described by Walker et al. (2014) found strong support in the findings of this study. In addition, the constitutive character and authority of narratives found by Throgmorton (1996; in Sandercock, 2003) and the possibility to convey interpretations through narratives stated by Hermville (2016) were reassured. Moreover, the potential effect of narratives used in stakeholder engagement leading to better understanding and consequently to better negotiation results as well as a decrease in conflict (Sandercock, 2003) was validated. Additionally, higher receptivity for opposing views (Miller et al., 2015; Quick, 2018; Sandercock 2003) and compromise and acceptance (Quick, 2018) were confirmed. The finding by Sundin et al. (2018) that the communication of information through narratives leads to higher potentials of receptivity and information retention was clearly asserted, as well. As a last point, regarding the possibility of bringing people closer together (Quick, 2018), the gathered data were contradictory: In project #1, the data supported this finding when respondents reported that a divided community was brought back together (Respondent 1a). In project #2 however, respondent 1c reported that hardened fronts made people unreceptive for narratives.

This thesis did not just support existing findings from previous research. It also expands the existing literature on social/community acceptance in the realm of wind energy projects (e.g. Gross, 2007; Wüstenhagen et al., 2007; Langer et al., 2016; Scherhaufer et al., 2017) and builds a bridge to the literature stream dealing with narratives in stakeholder engagement (e.g. Sandercock, 2003; Quick, 2018). As an innovative tool to increase the effectivity of stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects, it adds narratives to the literature of social acceptance of wind energy projects. More specifically, it elucidates a tool potentially leading to what Dütschke et al. (2017) and Eskerod and
Huemann (2013) propose as the outcome of public dialogue and a management for stakeholder approach – fruitful feedback for the project developer and mutual value creation. In addition, narratives have been found to potentially lower the envy debates described as a significant problem in wind energy projects by Langer et al. (2016). Lastly, this study uncovered negative potentials that earlier were not debated in the literature on the use of narratives in stakeholder engagement. As mentioned by respondents 2a and 2b, narratives can be used to stoke fear and stir people up emotionally. It is of utmost importance to be aware of the negative potentials of narratives when considering their use in stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects.

In conclusion, alongside the positive evaluations and potentials attributed to narratives in stakeholder engagement provided by both, literature as well as respondents’ perceptions, the analysis also detects several negative elements to be conscious about. Awareness of the existence and utilisation of narratives, their potential use, misuse and (un-)desired results, narrative-considerations as well as the underlying importance of trust are essential findings. Together with the compiled list of information, they complement measures of procedural and distributive justice. Over and above, narratives have the capacity to change a prevailing mood that is potentially characterised by distrust, fear, envy and rejection. They offer the potential to reunite divided communities, spark and foster interaction, disseminate information more effectively and thereby contribute to core values such as transparency, trust and fairness (Huemann et al., 2016) relevant for stakeholder engagement in wind energy.

The argumentation presented above can offer useful insights for practitioners conducting stakeholder engagement in wind energy projects. Next to seeking early alignment with locally affected stakeholders before the community gets split in opposing camps with “a predefined picture in mind” (Respondent 1c), a purposely designed ‘narrative strategy’ should be considered. One that contains a catalogue of narratives with suitable content that can flexibly be used in relation to context-specific conditions as well as local stakeholders’ peculiarities to support finding compromises. For this purpose, the compilations of narratives offered in appendices 3 and 4 not only serve as a starting point to constructing narratives in favour of wind energy but also to be better prepared for narratives against wind energy. These recommendations may help practitioners to successfully implement more wind energy projects. At the same time however, practitioners and communities need to have support from a suitable policy framework in order to further the energy transition by continuously increasing the share of renewable energy sources – particularly wind energy – in Germany (and possibly beyond) (Respondents 1b, 1c, 1d, 2a, 2b, 2c). Only then the further expansion of decentralised energy production benefiting local communities and contributing to sustainable development can be assured.

To support this further research is required to deepen the understanding of narratives as a tool to raise social/community/individual acceptance of wind energy. While investigating only two wind energy projects, the research process revealed three topics that call for further research. Firstly, a longitudinal study accompanying a project over its entire course is recommended to gain a better understanding of the use of narratives and their adaptation along the way until wind turbines are deployed and produce energy. A follow-up study of project #1 would provide such opportunity. Secondly, a specific investigation of the misuse of narratives in wind energy projects may gain interesting findings. This stands in relation to the rising influence on public discourse by so-called fake news, contradictory scientific data and conspiracy theories. It may produce a differentiated view on the use of narratives regarding their contribution to (heavily) polarise social discourse. Lastly, investigating the potential for the (increased) use of narratives on a political level appears important. As politics shape the general discussion and have the potential to reach a broad mass, the use of direction-giving narratives on this scale, regarding the energy transition and its importance for the local context, may offer especially fruitful outcomes.
Reference list


Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview guide (German)

- 1. Einleitung: ***-Projekt
- 2. Sind sie damit einverstanden, dass wir das Interview aufzeichnen und Ihre Aussagen anonymisiert in unserer Masterarbeit verwenden?
- 3. Können Sie uns bitte kurz ihre Rolle innerhalb des Windparkprojekts in *** beschreiben?
- 4. Ab welchem Zeitpunkt haben sie sich aktiv im Projekt beteiligt?
- 5. Wie würden sie das Projekt und den Beteiligungsprozess insgesamt bewerten?
  - War es bisher erfolgreich? Sind auf Hindernisse gestoßen? Welche?
- 6. Wie war der Engagement-/Beteiligungsprozess aufgebaut? Inwieweit waren Sie beteiligt?
  - Wie haben sie den Beteiligungsprozess wahrgenommen?
  - Schwierigkeiten/Hürden/Erfolge/generelles Feedback
- 7. Welche Informationen wurden innerhalb des Beteiligungsprozesses weitergegeben?
  - Welche nicht? Bzw. welche nicht detailliert genug?
  - Wie wurde ausgesucht, welche Informationen weitergegeben wurden?
- 8. In welcher Form wurden diese Informationen kommuniziert?
  - Broschüren/Poster/Handzettel/Präsentation/Runder Tisch?
- 9. Wurden diese Informationen, oder Teile davon, in Form von verbalen Narrativen bzw. mittels Storytelling übermittelt?
  - Also zum Beispiel die Vorstellung eines Problems, dessen Konsequenzen und möglichen Lösungen in einer zusammenhängender Form.
  - Oder: Informationen gekoppelt mit Wertvorstellung, Beispielen aus dem täglichen Leben, oder Bezüge zur Vergangenheit oder Zukunft.
  - Oder: Informationen verknüpft mit Emotionen oder anderen Projekten (erfolgreich, ähnlicher Kontext).
- 10. Haben diese Narrative zur Akzeptanz beigetragen?
  - Bei Ihnen und generell?
- 11. Haben andere Stakeholder im Beteiligungsprozess ihrerseits derartige verbale Narrative verwendet? Inwiefern?
- 12. Welche Information waren ihnen besonders wichtig?
- 14. Damit wären wir am Ende unseres Interviews angelangt. Möchten Sie noch etwas hinzufügen oder anmerken?
- 15. Vielen Dank für das Interview! Tschüss!
Appendix 2 Interview guide (English translation)

- 1. Introduction to project.
- 2. Do you consent to the recording of the interview and anonymous use of the gathered data in our master thesis?
- 3. Can you tell us a little bit about your role in the project?
- 4. When did you engage in the project process?
- 5. How would you evaluate the project overall?
  - Was it successful so far? Did you encounter any barriers? Which?
- 6. How was the stakeholder engagement set up?
  - How have you perceived the stakeholder engagement?
  - Difficulties/obstacles/successes/general feedback
- 7. Which information were provided throughout the stakeholder engagement?
  - Which information were not? Or not in sufficient detail?
  - How did you choose which information to share?
- 8. How was the information communicated/provided?
  - Brochures/posters/leaflets/roundtable/presentation?
- 9. Was the information, or parts thereof, conveyed in any form of storytelling?
  - For example, the presentation of a problem, its consequences, and potential solutions in a coherent form.
  - Or: Information coupled with values, assumptions, examples from daily life, or references to the past or the future.
  - Or: Information coupled with emotions or other projects (successful; similar context).
- 10. Did these narratives have an impact on the acceptance of the project?
  - For you and in general?
- 11. Did other stakeholders make use of any narratives within the engagement process? In which way?
- 12. What kind of information were important to you? How did you perceive the information?
  - Did this information change/shape your/citizen’s opinion towards the project?
  - Did this information increase or decrease your/the citizens’ acceptance of the project?
- 13. Do you generally think that delivering the information in form of a story can be helpful? If yes, in what way?
- 14. So, we would be at the end of our interview now. Would you like to add anything to the interview at this point?
- 15. Thank you for the interview!
## Appendix 3 List of used and perceived narratives in wind energy project #1

### List of used and perceived narratives in wind energy project #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narratives pro wind energy projects</th>
<th>Quotations (by respondents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fundamental narratives</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sustainability and intergenerational equity (*)</td>
<td>“I would like to live to see this environment staying healthy and persist for my grandchildren to have their fair share of it.” (Respondent 1d, May 5, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Contra – conventional energy production – droughts (*)</td>
<td>“Continue with coal-fired power plants and then we can talk about droughts. Just now we are experiencing another drought.” (Respondent 1b, April 27, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Wind energy to prevent negative effects of nuclear and coal energy</td>
<td>“But we have to do something. Nobody wants nuclear energy anymore and lignite-fired power plants only produce CO2. Thus, we can only achieve it [clean energy] like this [with wind energy], otherwise we cannot achieve it.” (Respondent 1f, May 12, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vision narratives</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Vision/idea of a prosperous development (*)</td>
<td>“In little villages one could accomplish way more, if one said ‘Alright, all of you, who live here, can participate [financially] and then we can talk about it [the wind energy project]’ If this happened I would say that it would have an influence on such projects.” (Respondent 1c, May 5, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “Energy villages” and communal investment (*)</td>
<td>“They painted the picture of ‘energy villages’. They tried to communicate the idea of becoming an ‘energy village’ were the own energy demand could be covered and exceeding profits could be reinvested into the community.” (Respondent 1c, May 5, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Local value creation and development (*)</td>
<td>“In the first step one should say ‘this is about value creation. I want that our little village or district develops through this.’” (Respondent 1c, May 5, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technical narratives</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conscious mind on consumption and origin of energy (*)</td>
<td>“And I know that electricity does not just come from the plug socket. And I know that alternatives would be nuclear energy or coal-fired energy.” (Respondent 1d, May 5, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Geological and legal requirements for geographic location wind energy sites</td>
<td>“When I answer the question, ‘Why do you build wind turbines here and not somewhere else?’ with, ‘Firstly, I have legal requirements, that do not allow me to build just anywhere. I have to comply to certain criteria.‘ And ‘Wind is a resource just as coal. I mine coal where it appears. Equally, I collect wind where it appears.’” (Respondent 1d, May 5, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Noise – problem, consequence, and solution</td>
<td>“Residents have the feeling it [the wind turbine] is louder than expected. ‘Is that even as it should be?’ Then we explain the consequences or possibilities, namely that you can consult the approving authority who then has to measure the noise level. The consequence could be, that if the noise exceeds the legal limits, we will have to adjust the turbines, e.g. by running them in noise-reduced mode during the night.” (Respondent 1d, May 5, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial narratives</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Financial/existential need</td>
<td>“People spoke about recent happenings in the community and why the situation was currently difficult. Some, for example, reported that they desperately needed the money to sustain their farms, since harvests were currently bad. They said, they needed the money from the wind turbines to sustain their farms.” (Respondent 1a, April 29, 2020)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Narrative of the company that creates a relationship between landowners and energy company (*)**

“I often tell the story of our founder, ***. He was the one who built up this company from nothing in the 90s. He is still the founder and we were not bought out. We are independent from investors. [...] That resonates with people. [...] We are still a medium-sized business. And our founder still acts out of belief. [...] This man is a physicist. He comes from nuclear energy and at some point, he realised, that it was not the right way. This opens certain doors up to us that would be closed if I was working for a pure investment firm. Here we can say, we are company ***, we are still our founder and we want to operate the project, not just sell it. Especially landowners want to know who their co-contractor will be for the next 30 years.” (Respondent 1d, May 5, 2020)

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**Narratives contra wind energy**

**Fundamental/technical narratives**

- **Energy storage problem (water reservoir) (**)**
  
  “And then he starts telling stories like, ‘If one tried to store electricity in hydroelectric power plants, the whole Sauerland area would have to have a dam and then you could go by boat from Arnsberg to Brilon, because that is the amount of water you would need. [...] Or Norwegian fjords. There we could save the energy and then pump it back down.’” (Respondent 1b, April 27, 2020)

  “Wind energy opponents often have the same strategy. They try to pull the project onto a higher level and to say, ‘Why do we even need wind energy? It is not storable anyways.’” (Respondent 1d, May 5, 2020)

- **Insufficient basic load capacity (**, **)**

  “The principle: Does, at this point, more wind energy in Germany even make sense? [...] Are renewables that are not capable of fulfilling the basic load reasonable? That we do not have to discuss. We are against the project.” (Respondent 1e, May 12, 2020)

- **Free energy suppression as alternative energy source**

  “And one in this project even asked me, why we even deal with wind energy. He then went into free energy suppression. Some Chinese researchers supposedly managed to draw energy out of space. Therefore, our doings were superfluous.” (Respondents 1d, May 5, 2020)

**Allegation narratives**

- **Facts depend on sponsor of the research (*)**

  “That is orders or pays the assessor, will decide what the professional opinion will look like. We witnessed professional opinions in other projects in the area were birds definitely are and were assessors found none. And if they found some they stayed in their air lanes, that were exactly where no wind turbine was planned. [...] This is all illustrated very positively – same with the bats.” (Respondent 1e, May 12, 2020)

  “There are as many studies that state that it [infra sound] is a big problem [as there are that state that it is not]. There are doctors who repeatedly treat patients with wind turbine syndrome and their condition starts to improve as soon as they come to an area without wind turbines. [...] Anybody who needs a study commissions it and gets the results they need.” (Respondent 1f, May 12, 2020)

- **Denunciate arguments by advocates and supporters as sugar coating (**, **)**

  “So what we typically see – and we have been working with this topic for many years – that is also a sugar coating.” (Respondent 1f, May 12, 2020)
### Personal impact narratives

- **Noise leading to moving away**
  
  “We also had replies from residents, ‘Yeah, okay, you can say all this but I know that they [the wind turbines] emit this level of noise and I know someone in village X who moved away because of that.’” (Respondent 1c, May 5, 2020)

- **Wind turbine syndrome (**)**
  
  “And at the event [the round table discussion] here in the village a medical doctor was invited who started to engage with this topic [wind turbine syndrome] very early on. He was talking about patients in anonymised form and what he witnessed in his praxis with people who had wind turbine syndrome was fatal.” (Respondent 1f, May 12, 2020)

- **Feeling of encirclement**
  
  “A big concern of encirclement was expressed.” (Respondent 1a, April 29, 2020)

  “One place mentioned that they felt encircled [by the planned turbines].” (Respondent 1b, April 27, 2020)

### Environmental impact narratives

- **Uniqueness of the local environment – nature conservation**
  
  “And if we look at the topographic situation here – our villages and the surrounding areas – we are in a unique landscape and accordingly we want to preserve this.” (Respondent 1f, May 12, 2020)

- **“Oil spill in assessment phase” (*)**
  
  “There are people who just make claims that, when the grounds were assessed oil supposedly leaked. And this person was by accident on-site with his fire-fighter-friend who also had the fire truck with him and they quickly had to clean the surface. ‘The oil only spilled in certain areas and there are no traces, so there is no evidence.’” (Respondent 1d, May 5, 2020)

- **Drastic, illegal measure to enable wind parks – debirdisation, ringing trees (*)**
  
  „Once – in a time, when beeches are not supposed to be cut down – in a forest that was designated for wind energy, beeches were cut down – but only those which had black stork nests in the tree tops. And the second incident was in a neighbouring area where beeches were ringed. Ringing is to take a chain saw and cut 2, 3 cm into the tree trunk all around so that the tree dies within one season. Interestingly enough, only trees were ringed, that had black stork nests.” (Respondent 1e, May 12, 2020)

  “So, listen up, currently all the birds here are being shot. That is not nice, we have to admit. And that is the other side of the project. As soon as an area is in question of being used for wind energy you can assume, that black stork nests will be taken down from trees and that here and there birds will be shot. That is the sad accompaniment [of wind energy].” (Respondent 1f, May 12, 2020)

- **Narrative contra wind energy – accusation of killing birds (*, **)**
  
  “I mean, of course, if you run around and shoot all the birds previous to the project, then afterwards there are really none left. Then you can build wind turbines, because then only the resident have to be protected.” (Respondent 1f, May 12, 2020)

### Financial narrative

- **Accusation of questionable behaviour of landowners to realize financial opportunities (*, **)**
  
  “If you want to understand the people, you can, because it is about a lot of money. The leasing rates are horrendous, at least from what we saw in the pre-contracts. The people who own according areas already went through the village with a big smile on their faces, ‘If this works out, neither me nor my kids will ever have to work again. We will live of the leasing rates for the next 25 years.’ Therefore, it is understandable, that they would do a little something to help their friends.” (Respondent 1f, May 12, 2020)

(*) The authors cannot clearly attribute the narrative to the investigated project. The respective narrative was either used/experienced in a different project or suggested to be of use in this project or in general.

(**) The narrative presents itself as incomplete. Complete narratives according to the definition of narrative for this thesis include a problem, consequences and one or more solutions with an attributed interpretation, meaning or emotion. Incomplete narratives are narratives that offer some but not all of the above-mentioned compounds, e.g. a problem and consequence(s) attributed with emotions or interpretation without suggesting a solution.
## Appendix 4 List of used and perceived narratives in wind energy project #2

### List of narratives used and perceived in wind energy project #2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narratives pro wind energy projects</th>
<th>Quotations (by respondents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fundamental narrative</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Wind energy, energy transition and climate change 2a</td>
<td>“Things like environmental protection or promoting measures against climate change was high on the agenda and was weaved in repeatedly.” (Respondent 2a, May 4, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Finite resources (Peak-Oil) 2a</td>
<td>“And already at the beginning of this endeavour we were making the effort to trigger emotions...because, for example, we worked with the Peak-Oil-study, things like that.” (Respondent 2a, May 4, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vision narrative</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Painting a future of communal energy supply, citizen participation, environmental protection, sustainability, inexpensive energy costs leading to support (**) 2a</td>
<td>“Actually, nothing changed about the vision. We still live up to it. That was the idea. And the people then followed. And specifically, the add-on of the ***-tariff – to offer the energy tariff.” (Respondent 2a, May 4, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “Energy villages” and energy autarky (**)</td>
<td>“Well, look at this village (I don’t recall the name of the village), not far from here, close to *** - yes, this is a village that has five wind turbines and they are fully energy autarkic. And they have this pellet incineration plant and make everything themselves.” (Respondent 2d, May 11, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technical narrative</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Comparison to sound of washing machine (louder) (*)</td>
<td>“And then you bring a few reference values, so they can keep them in their heads and, well, play with them. That a washing machine is louder during the night than a wind turbine. So they have a comparison for once.” (Respondent 2c, May 11, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial narrative</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inexpensive energy, local value creation and income taxes for the community (**)</td>
<td>“Yes, we want a privately owned wind-farm. And from this wind-farm we will provide you with electricity for 17 cents/kWh, and we will have local value creation in the community, income taxes will skyrocket and yes...value creation without limits, inexpensive electricity for everyone.” (Respondent 2d, May 11, 2020)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Narratives contra wind energy project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allegation narrative</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Establishing model airplane club to chase off birds hindering the approval process (**)</td>
<td>“So, one accused us of settling a model airplane club to chase off birds right there in order to not have any obstacles in the approval process. “ (Respondent 2a, May 4, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Certain landowners betrayed and sold the community (**)</td>
<td>“Immediately there are suspects that are being picked – without cross-checking the land register. The one or the other in the village knows: “There, in the back, that little piece of land, this belongs to farmer Lehmann.” And right away farmer Lehmann gets accused of selling the village for 30 silver dollars.” (Respondent 2b, May 4, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- All supporters/advocates have dishonest intentions (**)</td>
<td>“The one Judas, the next Judas, and another...and then you see investors appearing in the back, that indeed were there. But one only assumes the worse and accuses everyone of doing dirty business or dirty ambitions – be it the mayor or the church.” (Respondent 2b, May 4, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Accusing the church of selling property to pay their priests (**)</td>
<td>“Yes, the church also owns some property. And right away the church gets accused that they really wanna make money now. And they can’t even pay their priests. 'Whatever stories then suddenly appear...”’ (Respondent 2b, May 4, 2020)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Calling out individuals who want to profit from the project without acknowledging the community (**)
  “‘You only want to have that thing because you want to cash-in...no matter what the community around gets from it. You wanna make cash. This electrician who pushed himself forward to support the project, all he wants is to lay the wires. He only wants to earn money.’ Those allegation stories are terrifying.” (Respondent 2b, May 4, 2020)

Personal impact narrative
- Wind energy supposedly leading to people moving away from the community (**)
  “‘The people already move away from *** because of these wind turbines’. Well, actually, they moved away because they got divorced.” (Respondent 2a, May 4, 2020)

Environmental impact narrative
- Decapitation of migrating birds and piles of dead birds around the wind turbines (**)
  “Anecdote was that citizens from other communities with wind turbines were lifting up dead birds. We have a lot of storks and cranes passing through. Stories of decapitation were then told again.” (Respondent 2b, May 4, 2020)

Financial narrative
- Accusation of corruption and greed for money (**)
  “So, ‘we are all corrupt because we all drive a Porsche and we want more money, and so on.’ And because of corruption there was even made a complaint for instance. But nothing ever came out of it.” (Respondent 2a, May 4, 2020)

- Houses would lose substantial value (**)
  “There is a perception among landowners that ‘Yes, our houses have just been amortized or we are in the middle of it, mortgages without limits, we cannot sell them anymore, or we sell it for a fraction of what it was worth.’ This hits really hard.” (Respondent 2b, May 4, 2020)

(*) The authors cannot clearly attribute the narrative to the investigated project. The respective narrative was either used/experienced in a different project or suggested to be of use in this project or in general.

(**) The narrative presents itself as incomplete. Complete narratives according to the definition of narrative for this thesis include a problem, consequences and one or more solutions with an attributed interpretation, meaning or emotion. Incomplete narratives are narratives that offer some but not all of the above-mentioned compounds, e.g. a problem and consequence(s) attributed with emotions or interpretation without suggesting a solution.
Appendix 5 Mind map of project #1
Find the interactive mind map here: https://gitmind.com/app/doc/442284730

Appendix 6 Mind map of project #2
Find the interactive mind map here: https://gitmind.com/app/doc/2ec284746

Due to formatting reasons appendices 5 and 6 will be displayed on the following pages.