

D3.4 Report on one information event with representatives of regional and local governments; on 3 information events to engage with the public and on 2 roundtable discussions on permitting procedures conducted with relevant stakeholders

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Introduction

With nine partners, comprising European Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Transmission System Operators (TSOs) and one research institute, the EU-funded BESTGRID project works towards modernising and expanding the current European electricity grid for the integration of a larger share of electricity from renewable sources.

Launched in April 2013, BESTGRID is made up of four pilot projects located in Belgium, Germany and the UK. During the project, TSOs and NGOs work together to improve local public acceptance for grid development processes, to speed up permitting procedures by proactively addressing or even surpassing environmental protection standards, and to encourage the implementation of improved permitting procedures for European “Projects of Common Interest.”

Jointly, partners will learn about how to implement better practice in developing the grid. Some pilot projects will have a stronger focus on designing and testing new activities, while another one will focus on evaluating activities that have already been developed and implemented. The International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) will lend support by evaluating the activities from a scientific perspective.

For more information, please visit www.bestgrid.eu.

This document is the deliverable D3.4.

During the course of the project, Elia received new forecast data from the distribution system operator regarding the Waterloo zone. These data are shared with us on a regular basis and are influenced by changes in the economic context.

The new data indicate that plans for a new link between the HV substations in Braine-l'Alleud and Waterloo must be postponed for several years. The forecasts indicate that growth in electricity consumption in the region is stabilising and a number of large, one-off connection requests have been cancelled.

Since there is no longer a pressing need for capacity, Elia will not be continuing with its planned investment programme and will not be applying for a planning permit as initially anticipated. At present, the new forecasts received suggest a new timeline beyond 2020.



As a result, the participatory strategies launched with Inter-Environnement Wallonie (IEW) in respect of this particular Elia project within the framework of the European BESTGRID project have unfortunately only been partially implemented.

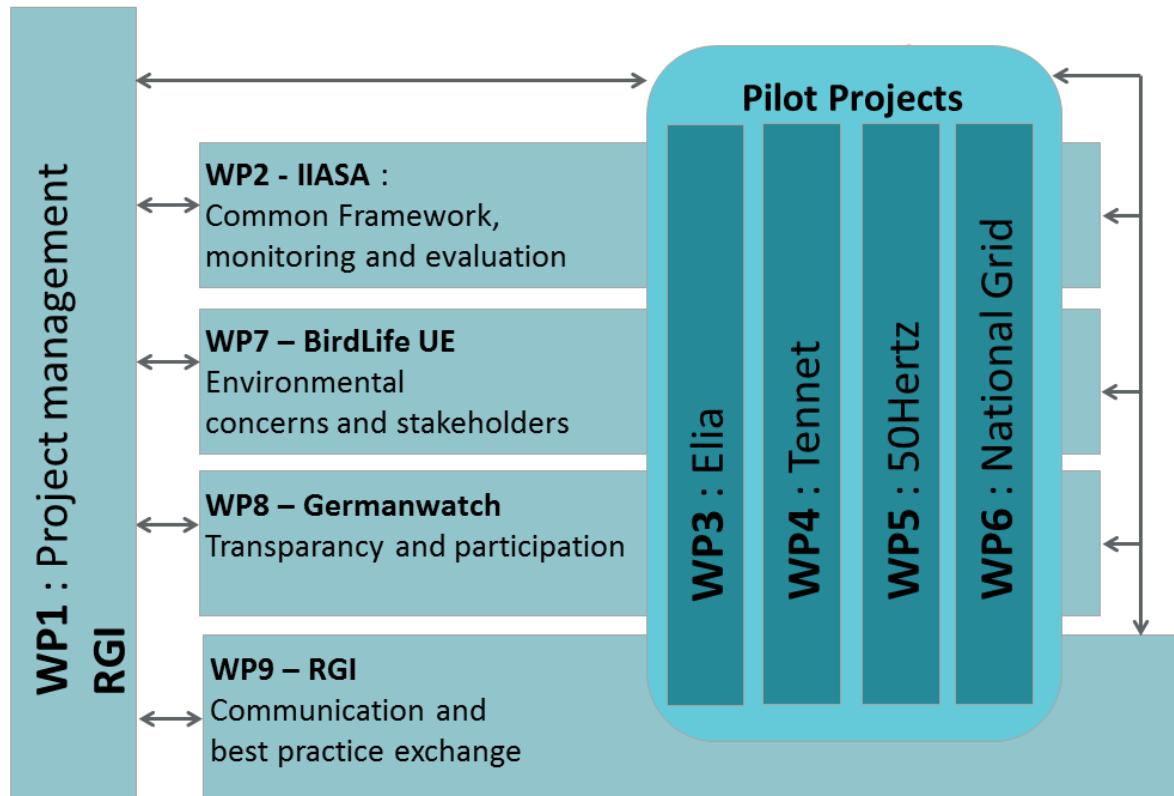
The second phase of the BESTGRID project consisted of an ex-post analysis of the permitting process for the Stevin project. This included meetings and round table discussions as well.

The deliverable contains the reports from both Elia pilot projects.

This document is a purely descriptive document containing the feedback received during the meetings. This feedback has been a substantial part of the input for deliverable 3.3.

BESTGRID partners include: 50Hertz, BirdLife Europe, Elia, Germanwatch, IIASA, National Grid, Renewables-Grid-Initiative, TenneT and Terna.

This project is structured in 9 work packages (WPs) as follows.





Presentation of Elia

Elia is not just Belgium's transmission system operator – it is also a key player at European level.

Elia is Belgium's high-voltage transmission system operator (30 kV to 380 kV), operating over 8,000 km of lines and underground cables throughout Belgium.

Our company plays a crucial role in the community by transmitting electricity from generators to distribution systems, which in turn deliver it to the consumer. Elia also plays an essential part in the economy, as our system supplies power directly to major companies connected to the grid.

Boasting a pivotal location in Europe, Elia is also a key player in the energy market and the interconnected electricity system. Our company has set up multiple initiatives promoting the development of an efficient, transparent and fair electricity market for the benefit of consumers.

Elia employs more than 1,100 professionals in Belgium who are not only committed to dealing with future challenges but who also handle the day-to-day operation of a system considered to be one of the most reliable in Europe.

Presentation of Bond Beter Leefmilieu (BBL)

BBL is the umbrella organisation for more than 140 nature associations and environmental organisations in Flanders. As such BBL represents the whole of the environmental organisations in Flanders.

BBL works in the entirety of Flanders and spans all environmental topics making it the most appropriate NGO for this topic. In the former years BBL has gained strong experience on public participation, both on policy-making level (e.g. anchor participation procedures in new legislation, participation in strategic impact assessment, ...) as on the level of spatial planning processes and permitting procedures for particular projects such as infrastructure and grid development, implantation of windmills,... BBL is experienced in dealing with the NIMBY-syndrome and in improving local public support for the development of on shore wind energy or local biomass installations.

Site : www.bondbeterleefmilieu.be



Presentation of Inter-Environnement Wallonie (IEW)

There are more than 150 environmental conservation organisations in Wallonia.

Mainly comprising volunteers, they defend choices made by citizens and politicians who respect our shared heritage.

Inter-Environnement Wallonie (IEW) is the federation of these organisations. For nearly 40 years they have been offering advice and support in the form of expertise, legal services, topical training and information material.

IEW also generates momentum that fosters debate amongst its members and enables the emergence of consensual positions.

Being anchored at the local level, the IEW views its efforts as part of society's broader attempt to rise to the global challenges we face.

The IEW champions sustainable development and fights any attacks on the environment, whether at local, regional, federal or European level. The aim of the action it takes is to ensure that environmental issues are taken into consideration in all sectorial policies, alongside social, economic and cultural dimensions, above all by making sure that the environment features more prominently in legal texts and political choices.

The IEW is independent of any political, philosophical or religious organisations.

<http://www.iew.be>



Why is Elia involved in BESTGRID?

The BESTGRID consortium brings together European NGOs, local NGOs (as subcontractors) and Transmission System Operators (TSOs).

Five pilot projects have been implemented/evaluated within the BESTGRID project, each focussing on improving local public acceptance of grid development and speeding up permitting procedures through early engagement with environmental stakeholders.

Elia is participating in BESTGRID because a continuing lack of public acceptance makes it difficult to obtain permits to build new grids. Yet there is a growing need for grid development to maintain energy security and connect new sources of power generation.

One of the main benefits of this project was that it provides an opportunity to work closely with regional and local NGOs. It entailed the joint development of a new method aimed at enlisting public engagement and invite environmental stakeholders to consider environmental issues. An evaluation of the communication and participative actions for an existing project was also performed. This unique form of cooperation will generate findings of use to both TSOs and NGOs with respect to future grid developments.

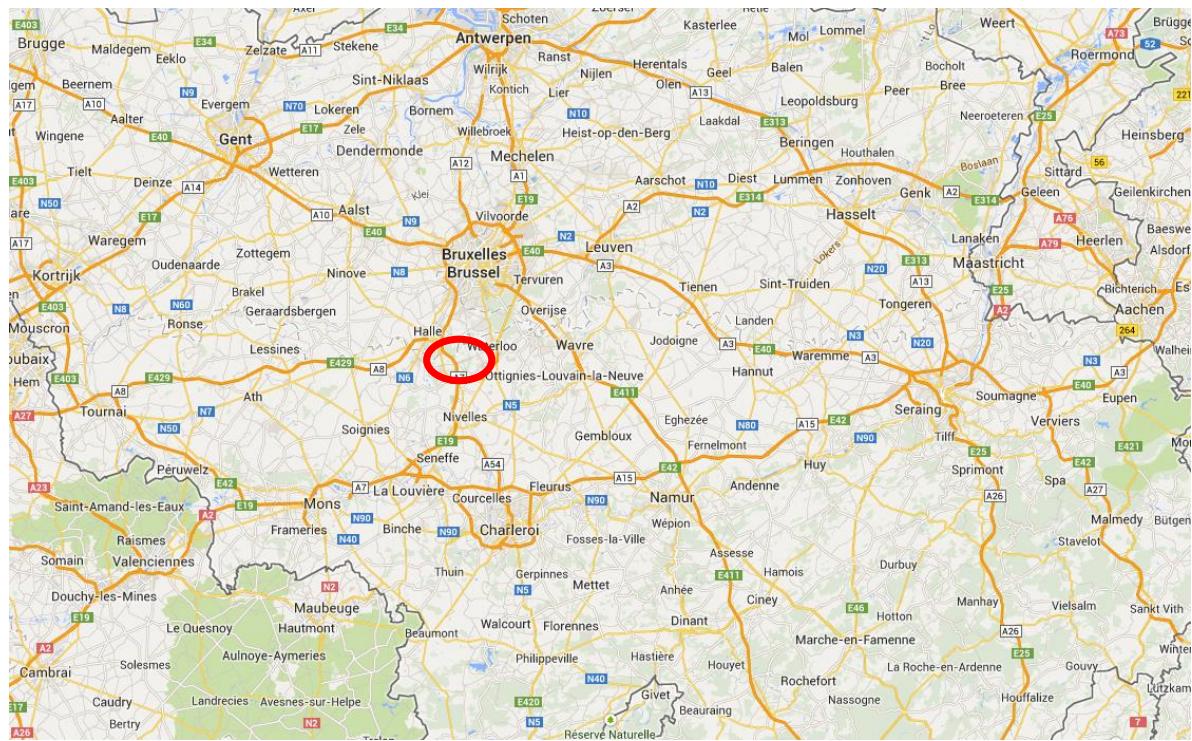
Elia expected its involvement in BESTGRID to enable it to improve its management of permitting procedures and facilitate the acceptance of grid development by local residents and environmental stakeholders.

WP 3 part 1: The Waterloo - Braine-l'Alleud high-voltage cable

The Pilot project

The pilot project Elia chose for BESTGRID was the one best suited to addressing the different needs identified within this context (timing, planning, project type, etc.).

Together with the Renewables Grid Initiative (RGI) and the European Commission, Elia chose a project involving a high-voltage electric cable (150 kV) between its Braine-l'Alleud and Waterloo substations, south of Brussels, in Wallonia (see map below).



The first deliverable D3.1. described the project, the need, the environment, the planning, the legal framework and the legal procedure.



Report on one information event with representatives of regional and local governments (Workshop)

Date

3 April 2014, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Venue

Council Chamber, Grand-Place Baudouin Ier, 3, B-1420 Braine-l'Alleud

Objectives

To further enhance transparency regarding the consultation process. This workshop:

- serve to raise awareness for the upcoming project
- inform about upcoming process steps,
- recognising that especially local governmental bodies (e.g. mayors) will often be approached for information by affected populations.
- serve to support dissemination of the document which can help local governmental bodies to provide first information to an interested public.
- introduce the foreseen process of interaction with stakeholders to enhance transparency on the planned communication/consultation concept.
- Where suitable, feedback gathered throughout this workshop will be used to adjust the approach to grid planning chosen.

Invitation

All administrative stakeholders surveyed during the stakeholders mapping exercise were sent a letter by IEW (Annex 1) inviting them to the Workshop, as well as a flyer providing general information about the BESTGRID project (D3.2.a).

The letter and flyer were produced jointly by IEW and Elia.

The following were invited to attend the Workshop:

- Mayors and councillors of the two towns
- Managers of the works departments of the two towns

- Secretary of the regional planning committee
- Chairman of the Walloon Environmental Council for Sustainable Development (CWEDD)
- Chairmen of the town planning and mobility committees for the two towns
- Chairmen of the public social welfare centres (CPAS/OCMW) for the two towns
- Wallonia planning officer
- Infrabel (rail-infrastructure operator)
- General Directorate for Buildings and Highways – Nivelles district
- Provincial Department for highways and waterways
- Federal Public Service Economy – Directorate-General for Energy – Permits and New Technologies

Participants

Those individuals who failed to respond to the invitation were contacted by IEW by telephone a few days prior to the workshop in a bid to persuade them that it was important that they attend.

The consultancy tasked with producing the environmental impact assessment sheet was also invited to attend to enable it to gain a clear grasp of the challenges associated with the project.

The following attended the workshop:

- Town of Braine-l'Alleud: Mr Scourneau (Mayor), Ms Lacroix (works department manager), Ms Berckmans (planning department manager), Mr Duwez (head of special unit, works department), Mr Forget (works department)
- Town of Waterloo: Mr Tumelaire (councillor in charge of planning, sustainable development, energy, agriculture, mobility, road safety and new technologies), Mr Desondre (works department manager)
- Federal Public Service Economy – Directorate-General for Energy: Mr Adams (Head of department), Mr Heylen (deputy)
- DGO1: Mr Frécourt (district of Ottignies-Louvain-le-Neuve)
- CSD Ingénieurs: Mr. Fontaine (project engineer)
- Inter-Environnement Wallonie (IEW): Ms Hess (Policy Officer – Landscape and Urban Biodiversity), Ms Xhonneux (Policy Officer – Health & Environment and Product Policy)
- Elia: Mr Coq (Permits Officer), Ms Huys (Project Leader), Ms Legat (Environment), Mr Maes (Permits Manager)

The following declined the invitation:

- Secretary of the regional planning committee

- Chairman of the Walloon Environmental Council for Sustainable Development (CWEDD)
- Chairmen of the planning and mobility committees for the two towns
- Chairmen of the public social welfare centres (CPAS/OCMW) for the two towns
- Wallonia planning officer
- Infrabel (rail-infrastructure operator)
- General Directorate for Buildings and Highways – Nivelles district
- Provincial Department for highways and waterways

Logistical arrangements

Logistical arrangements for the workshop were coordinated by IEW in partnership with the town of Braine-l'Alleud.

Preparation of the workshop content

The workshop content was determined and prepared jointly by IEW and Elia. The agenda was as follows:

- Introduction (IEW)
- Presentation of the RGI (Elia)
- Presentation of the BESTGRID framework (IEW)
- Why is Elia involved in BESTGRID? (Elia)
- Why is IEW involved in BESTGRID? (IEW)
- Q&A (led by IEW)
- Presentation of the Elia project (Elia)
- Presentation of BESTGRID action and its repercussions for the Elia project (IEW)
- Q&A (led by IEW)
- Conclusions (IEW)
- Written assessment by participants (led by IEW)

The full presentation is given in Annex 2.

The activities proposed by IEW took the form of open discussion sessions for the various participants and the debate – led by IEW – was very constructive. IEW had initially planned to organise brainstorming sessions with participants split into sub-groups but during the course of the workshop, it decided that such an exercise would not be beneficial and therefore opted to replace it with an open exchange of views.

Workshop

The Council Chamber is a large room with tables arranged in a circle. The presentation was projected onto one of the four walls and participants were invited to sit wherever they wished. Representatives from IEW and Elia sat next to each other, facing the audience. The Mayor of Braine-l'Alleud sat in his mayoral seat and the other participants sat around the table facing the presentation. Some participants sat in the second row.

IEW and Elia compiled a summary of the Workshop (Annex 3), which has been sent to all those who attended.

Assessment by participants

At the end of the Workshop, participants completed a written assessment (Annex 4). The assessment sheet was compiled by IEW based on discussions with the IIASA. The following main conclusions emerged:

- Overall impression: Good
- Interest in BESTGRID: Yes

Points to note for the future

A debriefing on the Workshop was organised between IEW and Elia. A presentation on points to note for the future was given during the first BESTGRID workshop in Hamburg (D3.5 and D3.6).

Workshop's impact on the action plan

The Workshop will not alter the action plan.

The Workshop will enable better preparations to be made for the planned events, in particular in terms of explaining the need for a connection to residents of Braine-l'Alleud.

The Workshop will enable account to be taken of the constraints associated with election periods as detailed in the project planning document.

Steps taken

The Workshop is not part of the statutory process; it is organised specifically within the context of the BESTGRID project. The table below gives estimates of the time and resources involved in organising it.

Activity	IEW (hours)	Elia (hours)
Logistical arrangements	6	0
Content preparation	10	16
Preparing invitations and chasing up	4	8
Workshop	8	8
Debriefing and minutes	6	8
Total	34	40



1st information event to engage with the public (1st part)

Cancelled for the reasons mentioned in the introduction.

1st information event to engage with the public (2nd part)

Cancelled for the reasons mentioned in the introduction.

2nd information event to engage with the public

Cancelled for the reasons mentioned in the introduction.

3rd information event to engage with the public

Cancelled for the reasons mentioned in the introduction.

Instead, stakeholder engagement events have been realised as part of the 2nd pilot project Stevin.



1st roundtable discussions on permitting procedures conducted with relevant stakeholders

Date

27 May, 9.30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Venue

Marcel Hichter Room, Braine-l'Alleud Cultural Centre: rue Jules Hans 4, B-1420 Braine-l'Alleud

Objectives

This round table serves:

- To improve the way in which environmental concerns are considered early in grid planning. To precede the environmental assessment and improve the common understanding regarding the scope of required assessment or suitable methodology for studies designed.
- To improve the consideration of environmental and other planning challenges and so to achieve better and faster permitting procedures.
- To achievement of task 1, as public acceptance is increased by assuring any environmental concerns are dealt with in a comprehensive and sensitive way.
- To be the starting point for a regular interaction between authorities, the transmission system operator and relevant local/regional environmental NGOs.

It was plan that RGI subcontract a local independent NGO in Belgium to provide detailed information about local environmental aspects and relevant stakeholders to inform activities in work package 3. After call of proposal, Natagora was selected to:

- Task 3.2.1 - Researching and compiling advice on local conservation stakeholders and their potential concerns to give input to stakeholder mapping
- Task 3.2.2 - Researching and compiling advice on conservation and potential permitting issues travel to and participate in two round tables

Invitation

The list of people invited to attend the workshop was compiled based on the stakeholders mapping exercise and the outcome of interviews conducted. Those individuals selected by IEW were sent an e-mail invitation to attend this first round table (Annex 5); they were also sent a flyer giving a general presentation of the BESTGRID project (D3.2.a).

The flyer and e-mail were produced jointly by IEW and Elia.

The following were invited to attend:

- Natagora asbl – Brabant Wallon regional division: Sylvie Simon, Yvonne Rochez, Julien Taymans
- Contrat de Rivière Seine: Carole Van Roy
- Gracq asbl: Carine Malpas
- Nature guide: Emile Henrion
- Nature et loisir asbl: Claude-Etienne Scorrels
- Environnement Waterloo asbl: Yves André
- Environnement Dyle asbl: Michèle Fourny
- Environmental advisor for Braine-l'Alleud: Anne-Marie Willick
- Environmental advisor for Braine-l'Alleud: Achille Dellevigne
- Environmental advisor for Waterloo: Anne-Catherine Bontems
- ADESA asbl: Anne de Saint-Hubert, Martine Poncelet
- Cercle des Naturalistes de Belgique asbl – Niverolle and Mouquet branch: Eddy Steinert
- Chenois Neighbourhood Committee: Christian Steffens
- Waterloo Inter-Neighbourhood Committee: Bernard Catala

Participants

Those individuals who failed to respond to the invitation were contacted by IEW by telephone a few days prior to the round table in a bid to persuade them that it was important that they attend.

The consultancy tasked with producing the environmental impact assessment sheet (CSD) was also invited to attend to enable it to gain a clear grasp of the challenges associated with the project.

The following attended the round table:

- Natagora asbl – Brabant Wallon regional division: Sylvie Simon, Yvonne Rochez, Julien Taymans
- Environmental advisor for Braine-l'Alleud: Anne-Marie Willick
- Environmental advisor for Braine-l'Alleud: Achille Dellevigne
- Environmental advisor for Waterloo: Anne-Catherine Bontems
- ADESA asbl: Anne de Saint-Hubert, Martine Poncelet
- Cercle des Naturalistes de Belgique asbl – Niverolle and Mouquet branch: Eddy Steinert
- Chenois Neighbourhood Committee: Christian Steffens
- Waterloo Inter-Neighbourhood Committee: Bernard Catala
- RGI: Antina Sander
- CSD: Kevin Fontaine

- Birdlife Europe: Wim Vandenbossche
- Inter-Environnement Wallonie (IEW): Ms Hess (Policy Officer – Landscape and Urban Biodiversity), Ms Xhonneux (Policy Officer – Health & Environment and Product Policy)
- Elia: Ms Legat (Environment), Mr Coq (Permits officer)

The following declined the invitation:

- Contrat de Rivière Seine: Carole Van Roy
- Environnement Waterloo asbl: Yves André
- Environnement Dyle asbl: Michèle Fourny

Logistical arrangements

Logistical arrangements for the round table were coordinated by IEW. The tables were arranged in a circle and participants were invited to sit wherever they wished. The event concluded with a lunch to enable participants to discuss the BESTGRID project informally.

Preparation of the round-table content

The round-table content was determined and prepared jointly by IEW and Elia. The agenda was as follows:

- Presentation of the proposed cable route (Elia)
- Presentation of the field study conducted by Natagora
- Presentation of the BESTGRID framework (Elia and IEW)
- Discussion of the environmental challenges posed by the project and Q&A

The full presentation is given in Annex 6.

IEW served as moderator for all discussions.

Round table

IEW and Elia compiled a summary of the discussions (Annex 7).

Assessment by participants

At the end of the round table, participants completed a written assessment (Annex 8). The assessment sheet was compiled by IEW based on discussions with the IIASA. The following main conclusions emerged:

- Overall impression: Good
- Interest in BESTGRID: Yes

Points to note for the future

A debriefing on the round table was organised between IEW and Elia. The following comments were made and points noted for the future:

- Some participants did not share as much information at the round table as during the interviews conducted by IEW.
- Some participants did not appear to seize the opportunity to influence the future shape of the project. This could be because there has not historically been a strong tradition of 'involvement' in the towns in question.
- The study conducted by NATAGORA was well received and there was no debate around it. It was used as a comprehensive and neutral basis for discussion.
- Much of the discussion centred around the issue of the practical implications of electricity requirements and the need to communicate transparently about projects which, at both local and global level, mean that a new cable needs to be installed. As far as participants were concerned, this is one of the key preconditions for such projects to gain social acceptance.

Steps taken

The round table is not part of the statutory process; it is organised specifically within the context of the BESTGRID project. The table below gives estimates of the time and resources involved in organising it.

Activity	IEW (hours)	Elia (hours)
Logistical arrangements	3	0
Content preparation	3	2
Preparing invitations and chasing up	5	0
Round table	10	4
Debriefing and minutes	6	8
Total	27	16



2nd roundtable discussion on permitting procedures conducted with relevant stakeholders

Cancelled for the reasons mentioned in the introduction.

Instead, public roundtable discussions have been realised as part of the 2nd pilot project Stevin.

Communication of the postponement of the project

Needs

During the course of the project, Elia received new forecast data from the distribution system operator regarding the Waterloo zone. These data are shared with us on a regular basis and are influenced by changes in the economic context.

The new data indicate that plans for a new link between the HV substations in Braine-l'Alleud and Waterloo must be postponed for several years. The forecasts indicate that growth in electricity consumption in the region is stabilising and a number of large, one-off connection requests have been cancelled.

Since there is no longer a pressing need for capacity, Elia will not be continuing with its planned investment programme and will not be applying for a planning permit as initially anticipated. At present, the new forecasts received suggest a new timeline beyond 2020.

As a result, the participatory strategies launched with Inter-Environnement Wallonie in respect of this particular Elia project within the framework of the European BESTGRID project have unfortunately only been partially implemented.

Methodology

In partnership with IEW, it was decided that all stakeholders should be informed of the need to postpone the Elia project and halt the BESTGRID strategies already under way. Elia drafted a memo setting out the reasons for the situation to ensure that a uniform message was put across. The most appropriate channel of communication was then identified for each stakeholder:

- Since the councillors in charge of works in Waterloo and Braine-l'Alleud were personally involved in the procedure (interviews and Workshop), they were the first to be contacted by Elia by telephone. Following this initial call, they were then sent confirmation of the decision by e-mail.
- Since the municipal authority contacts, namely the works-department managers, were personally involved in the procedure (interviews and workshop), they were the second group to be contacted by Elia by telephone. One works manager could not be contacted. Following this initial call, confirmation of the decision was sent by e-mail.

- The mayors of Waterloo and Braine-l'Alleud were sent an official letter by Elia informing them of the situation. This letter also stated that the councillors and works-department managers had been contacted as a matter of urgency.
- All administrative stakeholders invited to the Workshop were contacted by IEW by e-mail. The e-mail explained why Elia needed to postpone its project and halt the BESTGRID strategies already under way in partnership with IEW. IEW also thanked these participants for their commitment.
- All environmental stakeholders invited to the first environmental round table were contacted by IEW by e-mail. The e-mail explained why Elia needed to postpone its project and halt the BESTGRID strategies already under way in partnership with IEW. IEW also thanked these participants for their commitment.
- Local residents were notified that Elia had had to postpone the project via an announcement in the same local newspapers in which the announcement of the public presentation meeting had been published two weeks before. The same postponement announcement was also posted on the door of the room in which the public presentation meeting was to have been held and on the Braine-l'Alleud town website. The town of Waterloo did not want to post the notice on its website.

In the wake of these communications, none of the stakeholders contacted IEW or Elia.

Evaluation

A month after the postponement had been announced, IEW contacted the stakeholders again by telephone and/or e-mail to seek their views on the communication by it and Elia of the need to postpone the latter's project and halt the BESTGRID strategies already under way. We received feedback from the following:

- Town councils
 - Waterloo works manager:

Mr Desondre confirmed that the information had reached the town council by official letter and by e-mail. He said that the message concerning the temporary halt to the project was therefore very clear and that his department was now wondering what the new timeframe would be.

All the town-council actors involved had been pleased with the contact with Elia and IEW.

- Federal authorities
 - Benjamin Heylen and Claude Adams from FPS Economy – Directorate-General for energy

Neither of the two regional-government representatives understood why the line was no longer considered a priority when it appeared genuinely crucial and featured in Elia's development plan. In their view, this poor assessment of priorities risked prompting a ripple effect and compromising the likelihood of public acceptance of this type of project in the future.

Mr Heylen and Mr Adams were disappointed that the project had been halted since in their view the BESTGRID project could have boosted public understanding and acceptance of the reasons for needing to develop the grid in the region. They were worried that halting the project would make prioritisation of projects in general less credible. They hoped that this kind of project would get up and running again in the future since raising public awareness and acceptability were crucial to successfully completing such projects within a clearly defined timeframe and thereby avoiding possible challenges to them. Finally, there should be better preparation at local level before launching the project since several participants at the meeting of institutions had expressed dissatisfaction (e.g. the mayor was unhappy not to have been notified of the project in advance).

- Environmental stakeholders
 - Environmental advisor, Braine-l'Alleud:

In Ms Willick's view, the reasons given in the letters for the project being halted were clear and justifiable. Neither she nor her colleague were surprised by the decision which they felt reflected the question raised during the environmental workshop, namely whether the cable was really needed and concerning the clear motivations underlying the project. However, they were quite surprised to see a project of this magnitude fall by the wayside so quickly following a meeting at which there had been no major issues/objections, all the more so since the questions raised at the meeting had seemed to be relatively legitimate.

More broadly, Ms Willick favoured the approach of bringing different profiles together upstream in a project and to involve officials. In the future, she suggested starting off with a meeting for all environmental players.

- Anne de Saint-Hubert, ADESA

In ADESA's view, the information about the halting of the project was not at all clear. No one seemed to know why it was initially thought that the cable was needed and why it had now been determined that it was not: which areas were to have been supplied with energy and what were the projects involved?

This gave the impression that everything revolved around large real-estate projects which appeared and then disappeared without anyone knowing why. The towns simply follow along...

ASEDA wondered whether the participatory approach had been launched at too early a stage. There should have been greater certainty surrounding the project before getting local actors involved in the process. Wasn't the participatory process simply an exercise in greenwashing?

At the meeting with the environmental stakeholders, the participants were astonished that there was such demand for electricity without there being any specific projects in place. This gave the public the impression that they were not being told the truth. Had the project been launched to use money for unnecessary works? Were projects being hidden from the public which would reappear at a later date? The town should certainly be told what these projects are which are prompting an increase in energy demand. Why was this information not being made available to the public?

As regards the BESTGRID project, ADESA thought that it was a good idea. If people felt that their comments were being taken into account, which was the case here, then this would help to improve

relations. Plus, it is always useful for the public to know more about a project affecting them. That said, ADESA accepted that there will always be people who will appeal to the Council of State!

ASEDA wondered why information about the cable and that about BESTGRID had arrived with the town council and the environmental actors involved at different times. Why not inform everyone at the same time at the outset? The information had filtered through following the meeting with the institutional actors involved, and rumours about the project had abounded within the town councils. By bringing everyone together at the same time, the rumours could have been snuffed out and all actors could have benefitted from the information provided by the associations which were familiar with the reality of the situation on the ground.

The draft route put to the participants seemed to have been determined primarily by financial constraints rather than by the practical reality of the situation.

- Julien Taymans, Natagora

Natagora had been very surprised to receive information about the project being halted from IEW rather than from Elia. It also wondered whether there was any connection between the discussions during the environmental workshop concerning the motivation for the project and the subsequent decision to halt it. If there was indeed a link, this demonstrated the benefit of public participation, the latter forcing the brakes to be applied to the project.

Given the low-level environmental impact of the project, Natagora feels that there was little point asking for a biodiversity study to be carried out. Such an approach would be more useful in the context of a project impacting an environmentally valuable area or to install a high-voltage overhead line. Natagora wondered what the selection criteria were for projects under the RGI procedure. In its view, projects posing greater environmental challenges should be selected to really test whether such an approach is effective.

Natagora required more information on the technical details pertaining to the laying of the cable. The BESTGRID information available was too limited for an environmental study to be carried out.

When a project such as this is halted, account must be taken of the time/effort dedicated to it by volunteers. What value is to be placed on their involvement, their participation in meetings and discussions?

Natagora also wondered how the findings of the biodiversity study would be used. If the project had gone ahead, would these conclusions really have been taken into account at the stage of the works being carried out by Elia? And will they be incorporated into any future project?

As regards BESTGRID's general strategy, Natagora said that it would be useful to always conduct a small-scale biodiversity study along the lines of that carried out in the context of this project. The association reiterated that it had decided to take part in the pilot project because it had been asked to do so by IEW. It emphasized the need for NGOs involved in this kind of process to retain a critical capacity vis-à-vis private-sector requesters – in this case, Elia. In general, Natagora rarely collects data for other actors but it can supply data on surveys conducted by its volunteers and the general public.

- Christian Steffens, Chenois Neighbourhood Committee

Mr Steffens thought that the information concerning the halting of the project had been very clear. In his view, the decision confirmed what had been said during the environmental workshop. He was very surprised that IEW had not asked Elia about the project's relevance before getting involved; it wasn't enough simply for the requester to say "it's necessary". His arguments must be analysed in light of the impact on the population as well as of the need to reduce household energy consumption.

If, in a few years' time, increased electricity demand once again becomes an issue and the project is resurrected, it would be advisable for these various stages of the public participation process to be repeated since it was very encouraging that the respective neighbourhood committees had been consulted in good time and before it was too late for their views to be taken into account.

On the whole, Mr Steffens' was very positive about the BESTGRID project. He felt that the right people had been consulted. He stressed that it was extremely important that the participatory process be genuine and not simply a case of the parties 'going through the motions'. The process needed to be given adequate time to be conducted effectively.

- Eddy Steinert, Cercle des naturalistes de Belgique asbl

Mr Steinert had not received the information by e-mail. He did not have an e-mail address and asked that we communicate with him either by telephone or via ADESA, who knew him well. We therefore had a brief telephone conversation. He felt that the BESTGRID process was good but that there was

no need for Elia to reconvene the same environmental stakeholders if the project were to be resurrected in the future.

Points to note for the future

A debriefing on the approach was organised between IEW and Elia. The following comments were made and points noted for the future:

- Contacting the stakeholders again after having notified them that the project had been postponed had been an opportunity to find out more about how they viewed the BESTGRID project and the decision to halt it.
- Although all actors were fully behind the BESTGRID strategy, some felt that the participatory process had been launched too early, i.e. at a stage when there was still no certainty that the new cable would actually be laid.
- As far as Elia is concerned, efforts should be made to strike the right balance between a participatory procedure which can be run sufficiently upstream in the project to avoid a panic and having adequate details of the need to develop the grid. Moreover, it is not unusual for the schedule for a project to be put back by several months for various reasons. Such situations in particular must be taken into account in the context of a public-participation process.
- Some grid-development projects are more likely to be impacted by external events which can influence whether an infrastructure project is carried out or not. Such situations in particular must be taken into account in the context of a public-participation process.
- The environmental stakeholders all cited a direct link between discussions during the environmental workshop and the project being halted. They believed that the questions raised during the meeting concerning the motivation for and relevance of the Elia project were the reason for the latter being brought into question. This was not at all the case. The new forecasts received from the distribution system operator had nothing to do with the discussions during the workshop. Moreover, at the events organised by IEW and Elia, Elia always made clear that the project was in its very early stages and that the timeframe outlined at the meeting was likely to be altered based on actual grid demand.
- Several people did not respond at all to our e-mails in the wake of the project being halted, namely elected politicians, the Braine-l'Alleud works department and several regional and provincial authorities. Presumably the information they received was sufficiently clear for them and they therefore saw no need to respond to us. Perhaps there is no need to follow up with the institutional stakeholders on this topic.

- Some actors, such as the Federal Public Service Economy, were disappointed that the BESTGRID project could not be completed. In their view, the project had been a real opportunity to improve public understanding and acceptance of this kind of project.

Steps taken

This strategy for communicating to each of the stakeholders the need to postpone the Elia project and halt the BESTGRID strategies already under way is not part of the statutory process; it is organised specifically within the context of the BESTGRID project. The table below gives estimates of the time and resources involved in organising it.

Activity	IEW (hours)	Elia (hours)
Drafting the message to be sent out	4	4
Communication with stakeholders and drafting of letters	24	10
Debriefing and minutes	6	6
Total	34	20

WP 3 part 2: The Stevin high-voltage power line

Except for the meeting with the Flemish administrations, all meetings were held with the promise to keep the names of the participants anonymously in order to make sure they would not feel restrained in telling their opinion.

All reports reflect the opinions and statements of the participants. These are not necessarily correct and are reported "as is" in order to learn from them.

Reports on round table discussions

Round table discussion with local government and administrations

Location:

Bruges, 17th of December 2014, 14h00

Present:

- local governments of Bruges and Maldegem,
- provincial administration of Environment,
- administration of Agriculture,
- Regional Landscape,
- BBL
- IIASA

Reporting:

Procedure

- At the beginning of the procedure (SEA and Land Use Plan) Elia was very immovable. But during the rulings in response to the procedures on the Council of State, suddenly all kinds of extra mitigating measures seemed possible. If Elia would have been more flexible in the beginning, a lot of problems would have been prevented.

- Elia's strategy starts too much from done decisions. Through first constructing the Horta station in Zomergem, a lot of alternative routes for the line were no longer possible.
- Local governments were involved too late in the procedure. That resulted in a series of negative advices and motions from those local governments.
- This latter is not solely the fault of Elia. If the federal government decides to build a wind turbine park, they have to consider the necessary new power lines and communicate about it.
- The Flemish government decides about the route of the line during the Land Use Plan. It's not the responsibility of Elia.
- A reference is made to a case of Fluxys (other network operator). They are running a similar procedure. It seems to work better. In their procedure, citizens and local governments are involved earlier.

Need of the project

- Strikingly nobody knows about the federal Development Plan. This Plan has to be communicated earlier and better. Even when there are no clear tracings/routes of power lines in the plan.
- The benefits of the project were not emphasized enough. There was almost no communication about the project before the official procedure, probably out of fear for negative reactions. However 'renewable and sustainable' is a hot topic and should have been used to justify the project.
- One must not make the same errors with the future project of the energy island in the North Sea. But this seems to happen yet again ...

Transparency

- In the brochures of Elia there were no answers on the most urgent questions like 'Why not using an underground connection?' or 'What are the effects of EMF?'. EMF effects are minimalised and the underground connections are considered to be too

expensive. In one of the brochures there was a picture of playing children underneath a power line, what suggested that EMF is harmless. This made things even worse.

- The local associations and organisations like Regional Landscape have to be activated to inform about the major public concerns.
- Elia made a good presentation in Bruges, but that happened during a press conference after the ruling. It should have been presented earlier.
- It's important to explain this kind of complex and technical projects in a simple and straightforward way. For example there were some safety concerns about the underground connection at the beach. The local environmental department of Bruges had never heard about 'micro Tesla'. The explanation was too technical and too complex.
- The engineers of Elia assume too easily that everyone has the same technical knowledge as they have. But for instance the difference between 150kV and 380kV is not clear for everyone. Elia should have explained this difference better.
- The announcement of the permitting procedures was put on the wrong location.

Stakeholder engagement

- There was resentment about the fact that Elia started the permitting procedure before the juridical procedures on the Land Use Plan and the negotiations about the rulings were finished. Local governments got the feeling that their concerns were not taken seriously.
- The Flemish government did not consider the local concerns enough. For example the location of the Stevin station, right between two residential areas that are already heavily affected by industry nearby, should have been tackled better.
- The Flemish sector administrations were involved too late, too.
- The city of Bruges did not understand the incomprehension of the Flemish government on their procedure with the Council of State. There was a stand off between two visions: 'it's for the good of the port in Zeebrugge' and 'why does this have to happen between these two residential areas'.

- It's a positive thing that the location of the Nemo station was altered to Herdersbrugge after the ruling.
- Regional Landscape has a good cooperation with Elia (e.g. project for tree plantations) but there still are differences. Elia has a lot of technical engineers that want technical solutions, while the Regional Landscape staff rather wants didactic/pedagogic solutions. It's hard to combine those two.
- The manufacturers of off shore wind turbines were activated by Elia to lobby with local governments and to interrupt the protests. This is not a fair, correct approach. It's even counterproductive.

Environmental effects

- Local governments (and their citizens) don't look at a power line as a project on its own, but as a whole. The village of Zeebrugge and Zwankendamme are already heavily affected by the expansion of the port, extra railways with a new station, new companies with extra traffic, ... That's why NEMO and Stevin were seen by the public as 'too much'. On top of that the projects were seen as two different, independent projects.
- The case of Maldegem is very similar: the regional road is being transformed to a highway and there is the possible widening of the Schipdonk canal with higher bridges and barriers.
- There is a lot of frustration that the cumulative effects of the different projects is not taken into account by the Flemish Government.
- Through considering different projects together, other solutions would be made possible. For example adjustments on certain projects could diminish the effects of other projects on the environment or the quality of life.
- If the Flemish Government would consider local concerns more, then for example the reservation zone of the Schipdonk canal could be removed so that the value of the properties there remained the same. Then the negative effect of the Stevin line would be less important. Conclusion: there is a great need for a coherent and integrated approach of the Flemish Government.

- SEA: the proposal of one 'plug' on the western breakwater is not investigated properly according the local government, because of the high cost. But what about the benefits for the quality of life, environment and landscape. The SEA should not have to take into account the costs of the alternatives. Now it looks like the SEA was written for only one possible route, that was already decided in advance.
- The (project) EIA was conducted well. It contained clear recommendations and conclusions. Those were considered in the permitting procedure. The project clearly had benefits.
- EMF: Elia compared the EMF of the power line with the EMF of household appliances, that's not correct. Because people have the final decision on the purchase of those appliances whereas that is not the case for a power line.
- Everybody thinks that the precautionary principle is being applied, but it remains a problem that there are no scientific evidences that the EMF is harmless.
- Universities in Germany are carrying out measurements underneath power lines to inform the public. That is an objective approach, on condition that these universities are not sponsored by the energy companies. The importance of independant investigations is very large.

Benefits

- The municipalities where the power line is situated have the burdens of the project. Those that get the benefits of the project, namely the energy producers, should create a fund for the affected local governments for a better balance between benefits and burdens.
- Rulings: the local governments are happy about the rulings. There will be funding to improve the local quality of life. These projects will have to be connected in a way with the Stevin project (for example buffering).
- On the other hand the local governments where there was no procedure on the Council of State are left empty-handed. That's not a fair solution. Now some people are not in the possibility to get a compensation.

- It would be better for some projects to make agreements on possible compensations, on financing local projects or on a budget for raising a local fund. Instead of the approach that was now used: only rulings with governments or other stakeholders that started a juridical procedure. Moreover there is a genuine risk that from now on local governments automatically will start a juridical procedure, just to get money from the ruling.
- Not only financial compensations are a possibility. For example Elia is lobbying for a silent road surface on a highway near Maldegem.
- Another possibility is a more broad fund, following the example of the Indaver Fund mentioned by BBL (this was a fund that was created after a ruling in a court case of an incinerator). With that fund, organisations can submit projects about waste prevention and recycling. The fund is managed independently by the King Boudewijn Foundation. Something similar may be considered, for example an Elia Fund, where organisations can submit projects on energy savings and renewable energy.
- Compensation scheme: the zone of 60 meters (two times 30 meters on both sides) is arbitrary. According to the SEA the 0,4 micro Tesla contour is about 160 meters. It should be motivated why the compensation zone is set on 60 meters.
- It's not correct that the properties Elia buys can be resold.
- The (tree) planting plan of Regional Landscape in the area around the Horta station is a good example of how a large project like this can have local benefits.
- However, the management fee for the farmers (where the trees are planted) is too low. Farmers don't like tree near their fields because the shadow diminishes their harvest. Also the fee is limited on ten years, while the costs for maintenance remain.
- It's better to plant a forest instead of funding the forest compensation fund, it takes too long before that fund is used.
- It's important that the local government is involved in the choice of location of the power line, the pylons and the buffering zones.

First round table discussion with citizens and local NGO's

Location

Bruges, 17/12/2014, 20h00

Present:

- 5 citizens from Zeebrugge, Bruges, Damme and Vivenkapelle that wish to be anonymous,
- 2 representatives of the local department of Natuurpunt (environmental organisation),
- BBL
- IIASA

Need of the project

- The discussion about the necessity or the need of the project started too late, after major decisions were already made.
- None of the participants knew about the Federal Development Plan. This Plan is not known to the public. BBL and Natuurpunt should provide their member organisations with this information.
- The new energy island in the North Sea is the same story as Stevin. The discussion about the connection of this island to the mainland should start now already, not when the location of the island is already decided.
- The need of the interconnection is not clear. There is already a connection with France, the Netherlands, Germany and the Scandinavian countries. So what's the gain of a connection with the UK?
- Everywhere in Europe there is an oversupply of energy. Multiple (nuclear) electricity plants are shut down. People believe that the shortage of energy in Belgium is fake and created by the energy suppliers. The questions to Elia on this matter were never answered properly.

- Also, there's never given an answer on the question how much ampere or megawatt would go through the new connection and what the maximum capacity is.

Transparency

- The entire environmental impact assessment was only available in the town hall during the public investigation, but nowhere online. This would be easier though.
- The announcement was insufficient. The first brochure was hidden between advertising brochures. Many people will have thrown away the brochure together with the advertising brochures.
- Legally there were made no errors (announcement in the town hall, in the newspaper and on the radio) but the announcement was published in the newspaper of Antwerp and on the radio of the province Limburg. Not in the local media.
- Nobody reads the announcements in the town hall.
- Modern communication channels such as social media should be used more often.
- The information in the brochures of Elia is not clear enough. A simple question like 'how many cables will the new connection have?' was not answered.

Stakeholders engagement

- It's hard to find out what the government did with the objections. People have to look it up for themselves, that's not easy. Or they just find out later on in a next step of the procedure. But the explanation why certain objections are considered and some others are not, is not given.
- It would be an improvement if the answers on the objections and remarks of the public were published on the internet. The advice of the Flemish Commission on Spatial Planning on the SEA can be used as a good example. But this commission does not exist anymore, so it's not clear who actually decides on the objections.

- The decision on the permits is communicated directly to the involved proprietors, that's a good thing.
- During the info sessions local politicians should be present in the panel. In Zeebrugge they just participated as audience.
- The info sessions are too often a one-way street. The public listens but does not get any answers on their questions.
- Promises made on these info sessions should be kept.
- The local governments should involve their citizens in the rulings with the developer. Now there is a lot of uncertainty about the content of those rulings.

Environmental aspects

- All alternative routes were rejected, because of the high cost or the effect on the environment.
- A route on the western dam would have been a better solution for the inhabitants of the coastal district. Also considering the later expansion of the port. Now the inhabitants will have a lot of disturbance because of the power line.
- Nuisance is the main problem of the high voltage station, especially the cooling system makes a lot of noise. There is little information provided on this issue.
- A perimeter of 100 meters is too small to calculate the noise effects. In other countries this perimeter is 1km.
- The location is only chosen because it is on an empty military domain. If that would not have been the case, the port area would have been the first choice. The decisions were not made with consideration of a better spatial planning.
- Elia chooses too easily for the conservative solutions, setting aside the importance of nature and landscape. It was possible to make the connection of the new powerline with the existing one in the area of the port. But because of the board of the port was against this, this alternative was not considered anymore.

- Why can't Stevin be bundled with NEMO?
- People are satisfied with the fact that the line goes underground up to Vijvenkapelle and that two existing lines are demolished or put underground.
- Elia uses scientific studies on EMF selectively: only the ones that say the risk of EMF is very small.
- Studies on EMF should not be made on behalf of Elia or the energy industry. Research has to be independent.
- The same problem with the SEA: it is paid by Elia and therefore not independent. The government should be the sponsor.
- The proposed alternatives were eliminated too soon. Why wasn't bundling with the railways possible? Or with the Leopold canal? Why was there no alternative possible for the type of pylons? There were too few answers on these kind of questions.
- The pylons are right beside the boundary of the birdlife area. The negative effect on the bird migration will be equal to a line through the area. The promise was made to use some kind of spirals on the cables to improve the visibility.

Benefits

- Alternative routes are eliminated too soon because they are too expensive. But those costs are passed to the consumer, it should not be Elia's problem. Those more expensive solutions would ensure even a better distribution of burdens and benefits.
- In the Netherlands all adjoining proprietors are expropriated. That's a better solution than the purchase scheme of Elia.
- There's a lot of uncertainty about the content of the rulings, especially the financial commitments are blurry. The content of the rulings should be made public. The uncertainty only creates a climate of suspicion and looks a lot like bribery.



- Instead of using a strategy with a lot of done decisions and then afterwards solving the problems with protesters through rulings, Elia should look from the beginning for possible added values for affected municipalities and proprietors.
- Why were the properties underneath the new power line expropriated and the properties underneath the existing line were not?
- Projects like this are not measured and evaluated equally with others. For example: a permit for a small wind turbine on a farm is refused because of the valuable agricultural area and landscape, but pylons five times higher for a new powerline in the same area are allowed.

Second round table discussion with citizens and local NGOs

Location

Zomergem, 13th of January 2015

Present:

- 11 citizens from the towns Maldegem, Lembeke, Zomergem, Boekhoute, Eeklo,
- 2 persons of a local Natuurpunt-department (environmental organisation),
- 1 representative for Regional Landscape Meetjesland,
- 1 representative for Birdlife
- BBL: Erik and Jelle
- BESTGRID/RGI: Antina Sander
- BESTGRID/Germanwatch: Rotraud Hänlein

Remark in advance: this report is a quite literal representation of the discussion during the workshop. Even statements that are not (entirely) correct, are included in the report in order to draw lessons from them with regards to stakeholder participation.

Need of the project

- The plan for Stevin and for the high voltage station Horta was communicated through the local Mina-council (council on environment and nature). The local impact in Zomergem was explained well. The discussion was not about the need of the project but about the question if the location of the station wouldn't be better in the port of Ghent instead of in Zomergem.
- The benefits are for everyone, the disadvantages are only for the locals.
- The need for an interconnection with the UK never came up in the discussion. Inhabitants are not very interested in the global plan.

Transparency

- The majority of the participants of this round table, only heard of the plans after the SEA, during the development of the Land Use Plan. The SEA should be translated more to the local context. In this case, inhabitants were not involved early. It is primarily Elia that is responsible for the communication about the project, more than the local government. The local press should be more involved. That's where inhabitants get their information.
- It would be interesting to involve the local Mina-council and the GECORA (local commission on spatial planning) in the earliest phase of the procedure, before anything is decided.
- The announcement of the project by Elia happened with a brochure that was 'hidden' between local publicity brochures. According to the inhabitants that's a sign that Elia doesn't want to inform the citizens.
- The people that are affected in an obvious and direct way, should be contacted personally. Some of the inhabitants were contacted personally, others were not. Some people think that everyone within 150 meters should be contacted personally.
- One participant complained about the fact that the project is running since 2009 while he bought property in 2011, property where now a pylon is planned. If he had known this before, he would have never bought this property.
- The same is happening with the wind turbines close to the N49 (regional road). There is a searching area, but the exact location of the wind turbines is unknown.
- If the plans are not specific enough, it is hard for inhabitants to participate in the discussion. That's only possible when they know if their property is affected or not. The vague plans of the SEA are not clear at all and that makes it difficult to formulate a proper objection. It's easier when you know where the project is planned exactly and how it will look like, like for example the construction of a golf course.
- You can make as many objections if you like, on the federal, regional or local level ... they all say that the project is allowed. But they don't say why.

- The procedure takes too long. That's not only hard for Elia, but also for the citizens. People should be kept informed of the progress of the project, for example with a newsletter. In this case, a brochure was distributed from occasionally, sometimes with a frequency of one year. That's too long for not having any information.
- The language use in the brochures and certainly in the formal information is too difficult. Many abbreviations and technical terminology.
- Many of the round table participants noted that they were not aware of the info sessions of Elia.
- On the session days there wasn't provided very clear and specific info. About the type of pylons, the height of the pylons, the number of cables, the height of the cables, ... was not communicated.

Stakeholders engagement

- As an individual citizen you are powerless. The formal information of a SEA, Land Use Plan, ... is far too hard to understand for citizens. It's good when you can form a group of affected people, an action committee. The citizens that did that, have had a lot more impact on the project. Even for Elia this is better, because they have a better view on the different concerns of the public. That's why it is important to get early and accurate information, so that people can band together.
- If there are no local, civilian groups, the local government should take up that role and try to unite them.
- If participation early in the process is made impossible, the only way a citizen can react afterwards is through court. This has happened in the Stevin case.

Environmental effects

- Scientists disagree about the effects of EMF. It's not clear what's the truth and what isn't. Elia doesn't provide clear information about this.
- More important (to some) is the visual impact, the noise produced by the cables and the risk for falling icicles. The harder the wind, the more noise. If it rains, the isolators start to crackle. If

you live underneath a power line, your radio can suddenly start to play. This nuisance is more important than the EMF.

- The SEA is too complex, no one reads it. Especially citizens won't.
- The power line is just one of many projects in the surroundings. Next to the power line the N49 (regional road) will be rebuilt, there are plans for a wind turbine park, a natural gas pipeline, ... As a resident you are looking at a combined impact of different projects, not only the power line. It is the sum of all impacts. There is too little attention for this total impact.
- Elia chooses the easiest solution, the solution with the less resistance. A route through the port of Ghent would have been better, but there are other concerns there. As an individual citizen you don't have much to say.

Benefits

- One of the round table participants, who lives underneath an existing power line that will be strengthened, complains about the fact that people that will live underneath a new power line are compensated and he is not. He also says that Elia lied about the number of cables.
- Elia doesn't treat everybody equally. The option for buyout should be made possible for house owners underneath existing lines.
- The expropriation procedure in the Netherlands is better and fairer.
- Expropriation should be made possible for more people. A resident living near the line, and a regional road and a windmill park and a pipeline should have this possibility.
- If that's not possible, clear and fair compensations should be implemented to restore the quality of life in the neighbourhood. Like a quiet road surface, tree plantations, ...
- Why can't all the affected people get free electricity for example?
- For a specific case the state description of a property was incorrect. The owner is compensated with 500 euros while the damage is many times larger. For the damaged view there is no compensation.



- When you make an objection, Elia immediately sends lawyers to intimidate the citizens.
- Elia has the right of servitude for the construction. But there is a lot of uncertainty about this: where will the construction machinery be, where will the work site area be? This has to be clear in advance.
- There is extra budget for plantation of green areas and for the protection of the water supply in Zomergem. At least Elia is trying to compensate for damage.

Expert meeting Stevin with representatives from Flemish administrations

Location:

Brussels, 13th January 2015

Present:

- Tim Dewinter (Flemish administration Health and Care),
- Leni Demarest (Agency Nature and Forestry),
- Marc Odou (Spatial Planning, Housing and Architectural Heritage),
- Ilse Moeremans (team Complex Projects),
- Nathalie Backx (Arcadis),
- Jeroen Mentens (Elia),
- Erik Grietens (BBL),
- Jelle De Keyser (BBL),
- Antina Sander (RGI - BESTGRID),
- Rotraud Hänlein (Germanwatch - BESTGRID)

Report

Erik Grietens explains the purpose of the BESTGRID project. As a part of this research BBL organises this expert meeting with the different (regional) administrations that were involved in the Stevin project and with civil servants of the project team on accelerating investment projects. More specifically we want to see what the new approach of the decree on complex projects and the accompanying roadmap on the acceleration of projects, would have meant to the Stevin project. What are the points of improvement hindsight? What went well and what did not?

During this meeting we used the structure of the different steps in the new approach on complex projects.

Exploration phase

- In the approach of complex projects this exploration takes place before the announcement of the Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment (SEA). This phase has three large goals: a correct formulation of the problem statement, determining the partners and a plan of action.
- The goal is to start with early stakeholders involvement in this phase, not only with administrations and governments, also with citizens. Like this more possible solutions are found earlier in the process.
- The question is posed: 'how far can you take that?'. In the Stevin case there was a starting point and an ending point of the power line. These points were questioned during the procedure. If there are multiple starting and ending points, the number of alternative routes would be uncountable.
- One should start from a network point of view: What should be connected and why?
- The Federal Development Plan determines supply and demand of energy based on different scenarios. At this moment a new Plan is being developed.
- It would be a good thing if there were more discussions about this Plan. It is developed after a public investigation and an Environmental Impact Assessment. Even though in this plan the need for certain projects is being captured, there is little public attention for it.
- Elia has to follow and conduct what has been decided on federal level. Because Elia is by law bounded to take care of the connections, there is little room for adjustments.
- Wouldn't it be better if the Federal Government decided about the construction of a wind turbine park on sea, there would be immediately a discussion about the necessary power lines?
- In the state of California the local network operator developed a masterplan that contained the locations of the solar parks to be build as well as the power lines needed to connect them.

- There's a need for testing the practice of integrated spatial policy. Besides Elia there is Fluxys, the NAVO pipeline, highway connections, ... Now this is not integrated.
- The different levels in Belgium (federal, regional, local) complicate the process.
- Offering solutions in an early stage can be useful to start discussions.
- It is important that participation is made possible before any alternatives are repealed. Alternatives that are either technically impossible (underwater cable) or too expensive (underground connection) should still be discussed with the public. The public should not get the idea that 'everything is already decided'.
- Question: 'Isn't it possible that early stakeholder engagement strengthens the protests and the NIMBY reactions?'. Answer: No, these kind of reactions will occur either way. It's better to anticipate these questions earlier in the procedure.
- VIGEZ refers to their brochure 'Communicating with your neighbours'. This brochure contains different recommendations about how companies can involve the residents early and in a clear way. Residents should have the possibility to ventilate their opinion. Communication should happen before residents start worrying.
- Also important is that the person who is guiding the participation process, is neutral. For the serenity during the process it is important that people trust this person.
- This process facilitator ideally is not involved in politics and should not be the project leader itself. The facilitator should be another person than the negotiator (someone who negotiates about the compensations and rulings).
- The Governor (provincial level) can have an important role as the process facilitator. A Governor transcends local (and regional) politics and has the authority needed for the job. Good examples are: the role of the Governor of the Province of Antwerp with the mapping of the new infrastructure or the role of the Governor of the Province of East Flanders in the project of the canal zone in Ghent.

- Decisions are very dependent of the political support. Elia had conversations with all the mayors of the different municipalities, but this does not mean that the college of Aldermen agrees too. The same applies to the Governor.
- The Flemish administration was involved early in the Stevin case, even before the announcement of the SEA, through an administrative work group. It's a good thing that this happened in an early phase of the procedure, because alternative routes in the procedure were already updated to acceptable routes. Civilian participation probably would have led to different routes, because residents tend to think more on a local level.
- The administrations can only give a complete advice after everything was analysed on a technical level, this means after the SEA.
- The remarks of inhabitants may be incorrect or useless, but that's not a problem. It's even the goal of the SEA to analyse that.

Research phase

- Besides the SEA a Societal Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) is an important instrument.
- The local elections have complicated the procedure. It would be useful if there were some fixed decision points from where it is impossible to return. Now it's always possible to withdraw decisions and start the procedure all over again.
- How does the first research have to be announced? A remark that is often given, is the fact that the public isn't aware of new projects. Is social media a possible alternative?
- The experts present think social media should be used by the intermediates in relation with the public.
- It's important to make a good stakeholder mapping in the very beginning. The intermediate organisations can communicate to and inform their members.
- The local governments have an important role too for spreading easy accessible information to the public. For instance through the community newspaper. The problem here is that this kind of newspapers isn't published frequently enough.

- It would be a good idea to bundle all this kind of projects on one single, central Flemish website. This would be more effective than the official announcements in the town and city halls.
- To make the information easier for the public, it's important to provide visuals like maps, pictures, drawings and 3D visualisations. Nowadays there is too much technical information.
- Independency of research on EMF: this is not easy. There are only a handful of scientists in Belgium on EMF that all have made researches commissioned by companies. So it is very easy to google their names and then proclaiming that the research is not independent.
- Also for Elia this is not easy. Elia orders and pays the research and then gets the remark that the research is not independent.
- Deontological codes and recognitions can provide a certain level of independency.
- The same problem with the SEA, which is paid for by the project developer. But here there are independent SEA-experts used. But in practice it's possible that the project developer puts pressure on these experts for example to minimalise certain negative (environmental) impacts of the project. Elia claims that this was never the case with Stevin.
- In the Netherlands the system is totally different. There the developer pays the government and then the government hires an expert to perform the SEA. In this way, there is a greater chance on independency.
- Public participation is important too in this matter. The values and standards that are used in the SEA have to be determined through public participation.
- Not every research is objective, for instance the impact on the landscape is not quantifiable.
- Emotional reactions like 'it's not objective' should be overcome by including them in the process of the research. The goal has to be 'intersubjectivity' rather than total objectivity.
- Important is that the language used in the reports is as simple as possible. Nowadays there are too much technical terms, definitions, abbreviations etc. The public may interpret this difficult language as some kind of deception.

- Example: to explain the need for a 380 kV power line instead of a 150 kV power line, one can make the comparison with the traffic on a highway: it's not possible to direct this amount of traffic through a small dirt road.
- Question: 'Can economical arguments be used to eliminate certain alternatives?' Answer: In theory not, in practice it's not efficient to research certain alternatives that are ten times more expensive and will never be implemented. It has to be realistic. That's why it would be useful to include an environmental CBA in the research.
- However, it could be useful to research not affordable alternatives, just to show the public how expensive they would be and to show that no decisions were made without their consultation.
- Elia is in a difficult situation: their operational costs are regulated by CREG and they have to strive for the cheapest implementation of their projects. The projects may not have a large impact on the usage costs of consumers and companies. If these costs become too high, there is a risk that companies will move to other countries. Elia therefore has to stick to certain boundaries.
- It would be positive if the CREG was involved in the research on alternatives in the SEA.
- The partial underground connection in the Stevin case was the major reason of the higher expenses. On top of that it means a large technical challenge. Only in the Netherlands there is an example of a 380kV underground connection with this length.
- Also the economical impact in case that the project is not being implemented, should be calculated.

Development phase

- On a local level people always refer to other projects in the area (road works, expansion of the port or industry, pipelines, ...). It is important to develop an integrated vision on the area. In this way the global cumulated impact can be measured.
- An example given is Zeeuws-Vlaanderen (the Netherlands). The national level decides which projects have to be implemented, then the region has to locate and differentiate them.

- Another example is the region of Antwerp where projects (like new railways, regional roads, ...) are being aligned on a regional level under direction of the Governor.
- It's important that there is a global picture of this area. Especially in West Flanders there were a lot of projects being developed at the same time. Alignment and consultation is essential then. An integrated vision is necessary to get an equitable distribution of functions.
- Mitigating measures of one project can be used in another project. For instance a silent road surface. But then there are separate procedures necessary and there is the problem that different projects have different timings and managers. Moreover it is impossible to know all the needs in different sector for the coming ten years.
- But now different projects are separately analysed too often.
- In the Complex Projects approach, the goal is to take into account all different developments and stakeholders from the beginning. In that way co-ownership is made possible.
- The challenge is to make the public proud on the projects that are being developed in their area. When the Boudewijn canal was opened, there was a big celebration in Bruges because after 200 years there was finally a new connection with the sea. Today there would probably be a lot of protest against it.
- For citizens it is often unclear where they have to find the answers to their questions and objections. Those answers should be gathered on one website. The team of Complex Projects wants to do that in the future. They made a design for a reply form. In this document there will be a motivation whether or not the objection is being withheld. So it is comparable with the SEA-directives but with a clear motivation and easier accessible for everyone.
- Complete SEA's are not being published on the website of the department SEA. On the website of Elia all information is available, including the complete SEA.

Implementation phase

- Rulings: instead of using financial compensations after the closure of the rulings, it would be more transparent if there were agreements on funding for local projects.

- RGI is investigating on the European level how this is done by TSO's.
- In Norway, municipalities can raise taxes on pylons of power lines. In some other countries the municipalities get a fee based on the number of kilometres of power line. In this way local governments are more open for this kind of projects. But it remains a difficult point because it smells like bribery to the public.
- Elia now has landscaping projects together with Regional Landscape (cooperation with local governments and organisations). They get funding for projects on green buffering. Those buffers have to be linked with the project itself or the high voltage stations.
- There was referred to the example of the horticulture in West Flanders. Through bundling the companies that contribute to a fund for green buffers, the money is spent more efficiently.
- Idem for the wind turbines in the port area.
- Another example is the 'red for green' arrangement in the Netherlands. If a farm gets a new function, there has to be made an investment in 5 ha of landscape measures.
- In Flanders there is no such a framework of the government for a more integrated and qualitative implementation that would be better for the community as a whole.
- If a legal framework would be developed, a company like Elia could not be accused of bribery afterwards.
- There is referred to the situation of 'De Spie' in Bruges, where different projects come together: Stevin, the A11 road, a new football stadium, company expansions, ... It would be better if one agency would develop a landscape recovery plan for all this projects together. But this does not exist yet, so every project has its own landscape plan.
- For the construction phase there is being referred to the protocol with the agricultural organisations. This definitely has an added value because there are more than 300 arrangements to be made with local farmers. Without this protocol it would be practically impossible to contact them all individually.
- Wouldn't a similar protocol for other sectors be useful (for instance for nature organisations)?



- All information on the construction site will be available on the website of Elia. On demand there can be ordered a brochure (on the constructions). Elia will possibly use a mobile construction info stand. The goal is that all the questions and remarks go through Elia, not directly to the (sub)contractor.
- The mobile info stand is based on the traveling info bus of 50 Hertz that visits local markets. This is a good example because one can reach a different 'audience' than with hearings. Like this, it's also easier to adapt the message to the public, that's harder at hearings.