



# CREATING A LEGITIMATE SUPPORT BASE FOR SOLAR-PARKS WITHIN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

By Rick van Heuvelen

## Background

Facing global climate change, one of the transitions the world has to make is the shift from a fossil-fuel based energy system to a sustainable energy system. **The replacement of centralised electricity generation sources to renewable electricity sources requires adequate land. Accordingly, these decentralised, renewable electricity generation sources will be more locally and closer to the users.** It is recognized that social acceptance is the constraining factor in achieving public support for building renewable energy projects

## Objective

**The goal of this research is to investigate how sustainable entrepreneurs can initiate new solar parks, with the endeavour of local ownership and legitimate multi-stakeholder initiatives.**

To achieve this ambitious objective, the sustainable entrepreneurs must create a support base with community acceptance for building new renewable energy projects – in this case solar-parks.

## Introduction

**The investigation of what shapes community acceptance for solar-parks is important because of the high land-take and potential conflict with other land uses.** This gives rise to a specific set of economic, social and environmental issues. On the one hand, the Dutch national government must commit to its climate agreements. In order to succeed, the government implemented (local) policies, with new market opportunities for entrepreneurs simultaneously. On the other hand, citizens and landowners already started the bottom-up approach on a local scale. Therefore, there is a tension between the entrepreneurs – that are initiating the solar-parks and contributing to the national climate objectives – and the local communities – facing the negative externalities of having a solar-park within their backyard.

## Methods

**To answer the main research question, a cross-sectional research approach has been adopted.** This research approach focused on eight different solar-parks – and their underlying process of building community acceptance – that have been built within the Netherlands. As this research has a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews have been executed with eight different representatives of several organizations.

## Results

### 'Support base' defined by key actors

- Within the conversations with all interviewees confusion exists in defining the words 'support base' and social acceptance.
- All interviewees mention that within the world of renewable energy, no consensus exists about the definition of these words.
- Local government should indicate the framework of how acceptance for a project proposal should be measured

### The actual process

1. Site-finding. Mostly locations within sparsely populated land.
2. First creation of project proposal
3. Contact local government (municipalities)
4. Contact local residents
  1. Sometimes this step has been executed by the local party (e.g. village council or a Renewable Energy Cooperative [REC])
5. Creation of community acceptance

### Collaboration with local party

Some entrepreneurs mention that they give priority to collaborate with a local party. These collaborations contribute to the initiation of local ownership for the community. According to those entrepreneurs, it is beneficial because the REC speaks the local language and knows the culture, so they have an advantage in having the conversation with the local residents.

### Addressed factors

#### Factors that have been addressed to create 'community acceptance'

- Aesthetic: Visual impact, glint & glare, impact on the landscape
- Economic: Property values, land values
- Environmental: Wildlife & habits, decrease of biodiversity
- Social: Employment opportunities, sustainability funds
- Procedural: Trust & transparency, business model, project identity

## Conclusions

- Vagueness around definitions and frameworks
- In practice, a clear process is lacking. However, the results indicate a need for political acceptance first, before an entrepreneur can start the process to create community acceptance.
- The contribution of a REC in the process to create community acceptance is highly appreciated by most organizations. RECs have high responsibility within the community and possess a higher degree of reliability.
- A decent framework and an open negotiation process are needed to create a legitimate support-base. Local residents appreciate having a strong within the decision-making process.