



Ireland's Just Transition – A report on the perceptions of impacted communities in Ireland

Introduction

A team of researchers from University College Dublin followed closely the closure announcements of the Lough Ree Power Station in Lanesborough - Ballyleague, and the impacts on the peat-extraction business of Bord na Móna. The researchers visited the community and spoke to many workers and community members to gather preliminary information about these developments in the Midlands area. The aim of this research was to explore what people in the Lanesborough - Ballyleague community think about recent energy-related developments in their community.

From our initial interviews with community members, we learned how people feel about the future of the community once the economic opportunities created by Bord na Móna and the ESB would wind down. Some alternative solutions to rejuvenate the local economy were proposed, including proposals about the rehabilitation of the bogs, and forming the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park in order to further strengthen the local tourism industry. Additionally, some community members suggested that some of the bog areas can be converted into solar farms. We also found community members were divided in their support and opposition to the Derryadd Wind Farm proposed to be built by Bord na Móna.

Based on these initial understandings, a survey instrument was designed and implemented in the Lanesborough - Ballyleague community in the month of February 2020. The survey assessed the level of acceptability of four different alternative situations in the area. In the survey, we asked how the wider community perceived the various scenarios of how the region may develop in the future. It is important to point out that the survey was conducted in the densely populated areas of Lanesborough - Ballyleague, and not among households located around the proposed Derryadd Wind Farm. We stopped the survey data collection a little earlier than planned due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Overall, 181 residents from the Lanesborough - Ballyleague community took part in the survey. Below we present a summary of some of the findings.

If you have any questions about this study please feel free to contact Vanja Medugorac on vanja.medugorac@ucdconnect.ie or Dr. Aparajita Banerjee on aparajita.banerjee@ucd.ie.



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Community perceptions on the closure of Lough Ree Power Station



Figure 3. The Lough Ree Power Plant

The Lough Ree Power Station in Lanesborough which operates on peat fuel is expected to close by the end of 2020. Participants in our study were asked to what extent they support closing down of the power station.

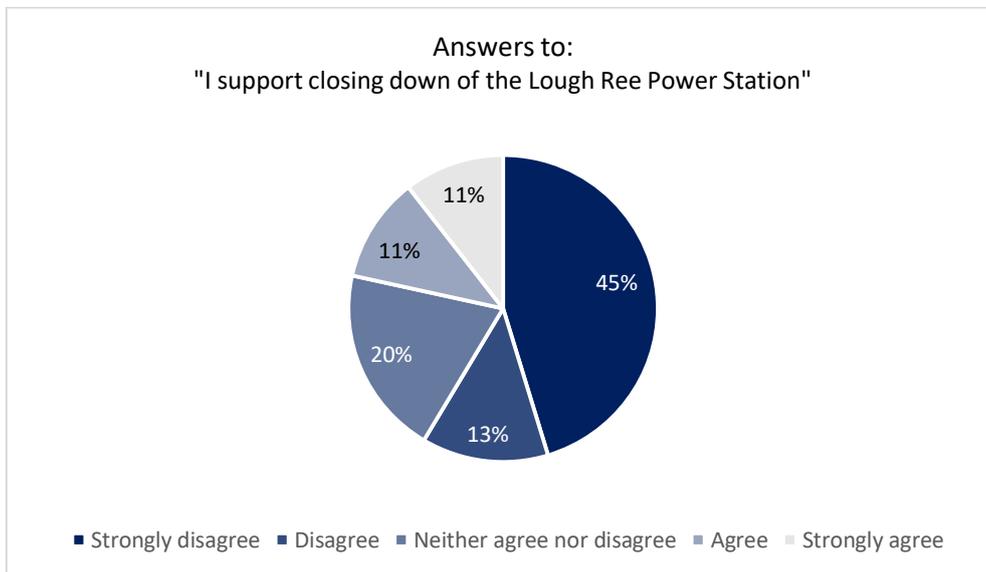


Figure 4. Community support for closing down of the Lough Ree Power Station

Most participants (58%) disagrees or strongly disagrees with closing down of Lough Ree Power station. One fifth of participants neither agrees nor disagrees with its closing down, while somewhat more than one fifth of participants (22%) agrees or strongly agrees with its closure.

Community perceptions of the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park



Figure 5. Illustration of boglands

A group of community members has proposed that bog areas could be rehabilitated into wetlands like their original state. Bogland rehabilitation is also a part of Bord Na Móna’s development plan. It is envisaged that those highly extracted bog areas, in combination with amenities such as Lough Ree lake and the River Shannon could form the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park. This project aims to integrate tourism with rehabilitation of bogs and expansion of biodiversity potential in the Midlands area.

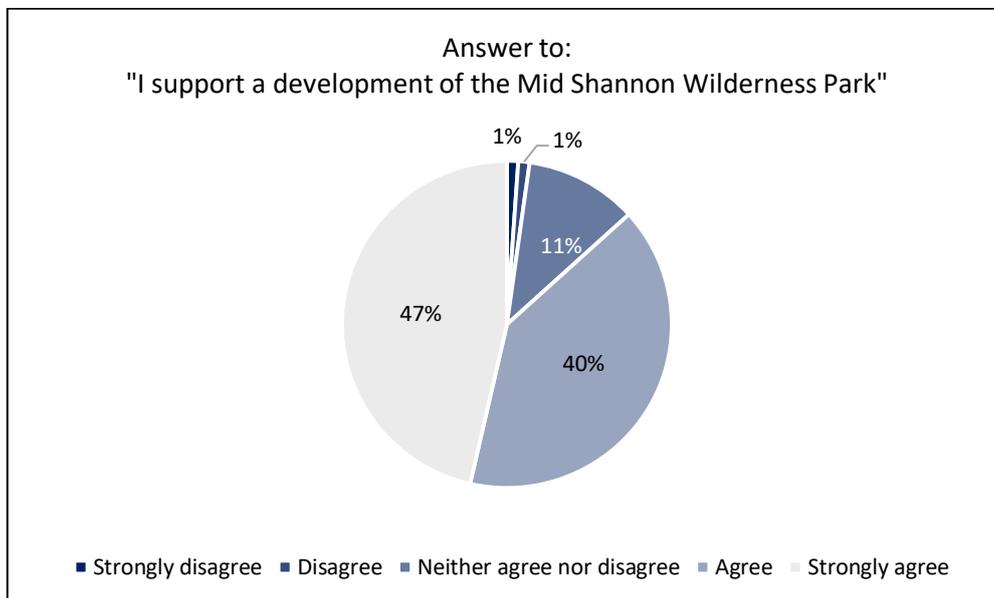


Figure 6. Community support for development of the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park

A large majority of participants (87%) expressed their support for the development of the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park. Eleven percent of the participants were undecided, while only 2% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement showing overall support for the development of the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park by the community members.

Solar farms in the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park



Figure 7. Illustration of what solar panels on the bogs could look like

In addition to the integration of tourism with rehabilitation of bogs and biodiversity, the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park could also include a renewable energy project. Some community members proposed that solar farms could be integrated within the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park. Figure 7 illustrates what that might look like.

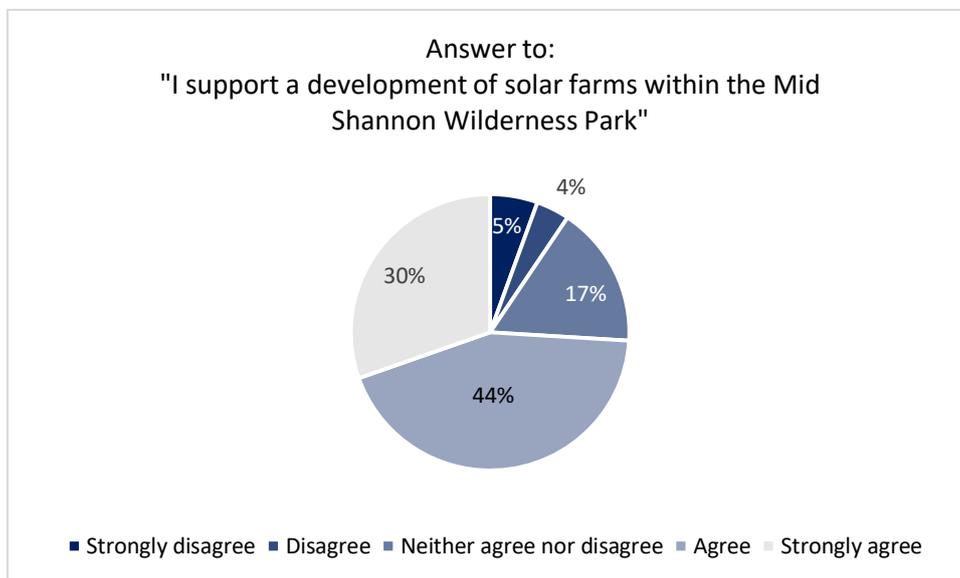


Figure 8. Community support for development of the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park

A majority of the participants (74%) support or strongly support the idea of a development of solar farms within the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park. Seventeen percent of participants were undecided, while 9% disagrees or strongly disagrees with this proposal.

Community perceptions of the Derryadd Wind Farm



Figure 9. Illustration of what Derryadd Wind Farm project could look like

Bord na Móna Powergen Limited has proposed to develop the Derryadd Wind Farm which would include 24 wind turbines with a capacity of 4 MW per turbine in some of the bog areas near your community. The turbines would have a blade tip height of a maximum of 185 meters. The proposed development would lie between the towns and villages of Lanesborough, Derraghan, Keenagh and Killashee. The wind farms would be put in the boglands, and some wetlands may be created around them.

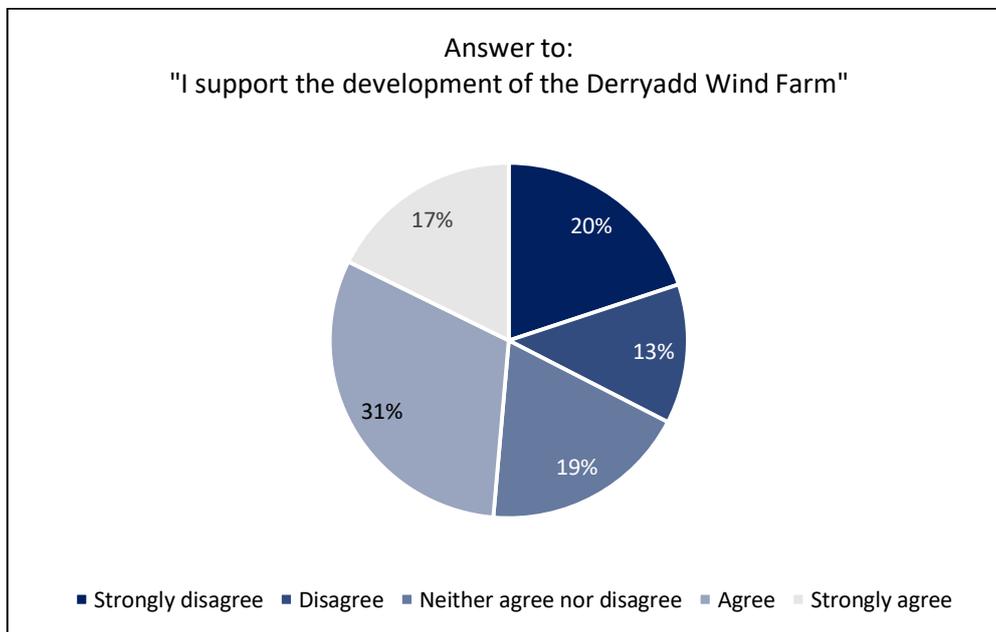
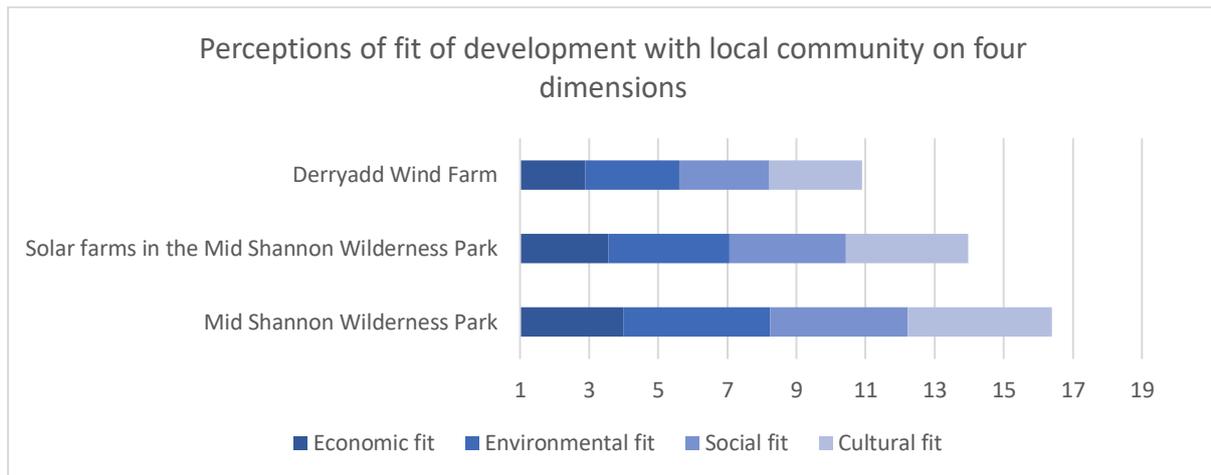


Figure 10. Community support for the development of the Derryadd Wind Farm

Almost half of the participants who took part in our study (48%) agree or strongly agree with the development of the Derryadd Wind Farm. Nineteen percent of participants are undecided, whilst one third of participants (33%) disagrees or strongly disagrees with the development of the Derryadd Wind Farm.

The perception of fit of new (energy) developments among the members of Lanesborough - Ballyleague community?

We asked participants in our study how much local economy would benefit from each of the proposed projects (*economic fit*), how much each project fits with the local environment (*environmental fit*), how much would it enhance interaction and cohesion among community members (*social fit*), and how much would it fit with the culture of local communities (*cultural fit*).



Overall, participants feel that the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park fit best with the local community, followed by the proposed development to include solar farms in the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park. The Derryadd Wind Farm was perceived least fitting development plan by the participants from Lanesborough – Ballyleague community. As for the four dimensions, participants in our study considered all of them, which implies that, in contrast to what often is assumed, not only economic reasons are important, environmental, social and cultural community aspects are equally important for the development of the region.

Conclusion

We found that community members generally expect that the closure of the ESB and Bord na Móna businesses in the area would be a big blow to the people's local economy and livelihood opportunities. They were firmly against the closure of these businesses. From our interviews, we further gathered that though the community members knew that days of peat were over, the suddenness of the decision without an alternative plan made the situation complicated for them.

Given this sudden development, the community members are thinking about the future of the region. With two semi-state companies closing in the area, there are challenges ahead. Community members strongly hope for the Just Transition Fund that was promised to be channelled in the Midlands by the national government, as this would improve the local economic and social situation. Currently, deliberations are underway at the European Union level, where regions affected by decarbonization would be helped from a Just Transition Fund, which includes the Midlands of Ireland.

This research found that the people overwhelmingly support the construction of the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park in the area. They feel that the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park would be a good fit with the communities, that is, economically, environmentally, socially, and culturally. In terms of energy generation in the area, support for the solar farms far outweighs the community support for the Derryard Wind Farm, as the Derryard Wind Farm is seen as least fitting with local social, cultural, economic, and environmental conditions.

We could like to thank the members of the Lanesborough - Ballyleague community for their participation in the research.

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