

Development of an online guidance document for successful siting processes and risk communication in the field of mobile phone conflicts

Ortwin Renn, Frank Ulmer and Sylvia Hiller

Oberschleißheim, 19 October 2006



Characteristics of EMF Risks

- *Characteristics*

- Health impacts unlikely but still uncertain
- Limited knowledge about long term effects
- Difference between perception of mobile phones and transmitter antennas
- Often non-risk symbolic associations and beliefs in public perception

- *Problems*

- Large populations exposed to EMF
- Most concerns relate to siting procedures
- Different interpretation of precaution
- High social mobilization potential by small but effective subgroups

Perception of EMF Risks

- Representation of Cluster: “Creeping danger”
 - Concern about long-term impacts
 - Reliance on third party information
 - Perception as invisible and unnatural
 - Key variable trust:
 - If yes: risk-benefit balancing (positive)
 - If no: request for zero risk
 - If maybe: orientation on external criteria
 - Concern about procedural equity and due process
- High sensibility for symbolic aspects of risks

Project Objectives

- Improving risk communication and facilitating conflict resolution by providing more effective methods for public dialogue and conflict management in siting decisions about mobile phone transmitters
- Development of strategies for anticipating, preventing or mitigating conflicts on the community level
- Development of a guidance document assisting community planners to deal with and manage emerging conflicts about the siting of mobile phone transmitters

Final Product

Online guidance document for local authorities,
which should assist them...

- to deal with conflicts before they escalate
- to achieve socially acceptable solutions by means of public dialogue and stakeholder /citizens involvement

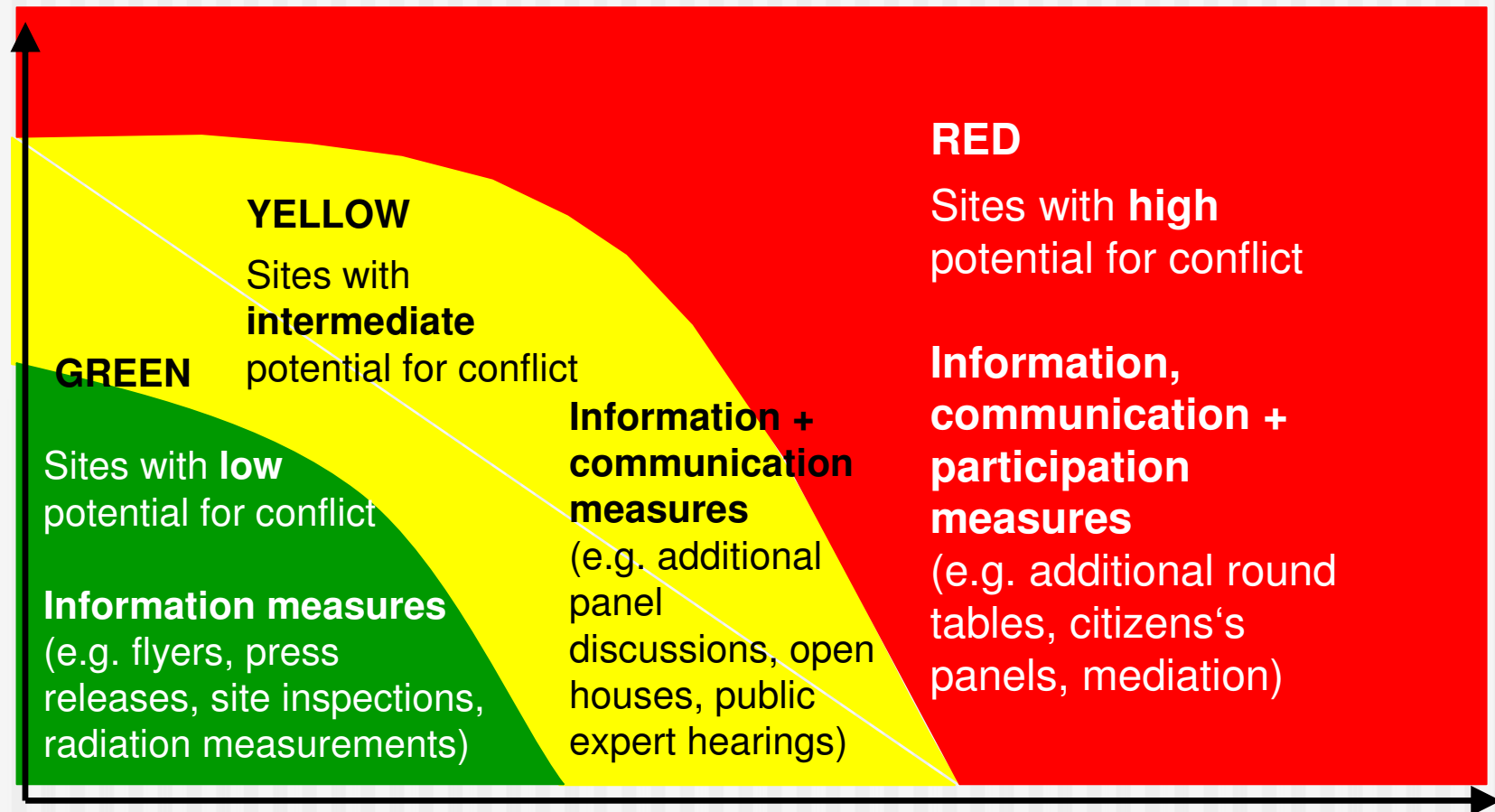
Main Concept

- **Identifying the (conflict) situation in communities** by means of a cumulative ‚Traffic Light Model‘ according to Kemp/Greulich
- **Allocation** of siting conflicts to each traffic light phase (green, amber, red)
- **Development** of appropriate measures for dealing with each phase of the model

⇒ **Challenge:**

Is it possible to categorize and generalize unique situations on the basis of three main escalation levels?

„Traffic Light Model“



Objectives of Guidance Document

1. Enable communities to appraise the conflict potential when siting transmitter stations
2. Apply (easy-to-use) quantitative and qualitative indicators for identifying the escalation level of conflict
3. Make use of situation-specific instruments of conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution
4. Provide effective measures for evaluating of one's own approach

Research Targets

- ⇒ Development of criteria for the systematic allocation of specific site conflicts to the three traffic light phases through *case studies* and *expert constltations*
- ⇒ Development of appropriate instruments for each level of the traffic light model
- ⇒ **Challenges:**
 - ⇒ many criteria are bi-directional in relation to conflict potential (e.g. central or decentralized siting strategies)
 - ⇒ Many instruments may be effective in more than one escalation level
 - ⇒ Limits of generalization and categorization

Methods

1. **Media analysis** to define typical conflict characteristics
2. **Inventory and analysis** of existing guidelines/ manuals and handbooks (e.g. Kemp/Greulich „Working with the Community“)
3. **Case studies**, including semi-structured *interviews* with community authorities, providers and representatives of organised citizens at locations with different degrees of conflict potential
4. **Expert consultations** through **advisory council** and contributions at the **workshop** „Successful procedures at the site acquisition process for mobile phone base stations“ (agenda-transfer)

Case Studies

Special **focus** on:

1. Identification of typical conflict procedures and allocation to traffic light levels
2. Testing the applicability of the criteria suggested by the team
3. Analysis of the effectiveness of the instruments used for conflict prevention, mitigation, and resolution
4. Analysis of the usefulness and effectiveness of existing manuals (subjective assessment by users)
5. Inquiry of the information demand by community authorities

Preliminary Results I

- Most community officials (particularly from small communities) are either not aware of or do not use existing manuals
- Communication/co-ordination between politicians and administration is often perceived as a major problem
- In situations of conflict, physical measurements of exposure has been an effective instrument for de-escalation
→ **but:** technical knowledge is needed for interpreting results, slippery road if health impacts are addressed!
- Competent information by community authorities at an early stage is highly appreciated by stakeholders and citizens,
→ **but:** this request is often not acknowledged by communities!

Preliminary Results II

- Effective and efficient information to community officials as well as by community officials to stakeholders is often deficient and inadequate (self-assessment by interview-partners)
- Especially small communities face problems due to lack of routine and technical/legal competence
- Presently, conflicts are most frequent in small, rural communities
⇒ hence, this will be the main target for the online guidance document
- Proposal of a modular online guidance document has been highly welcomed by community representatives as well as the main stakeholders

Preliminary Results III

- Instruments recommended for low conflict situations (green level)
 - Early information of communities
 - Apply best communication strategy
 - Full transparency about siting process
 - Availability of experts for questioning and inquiries
 - Cooperation with local community leaders

Preliminary Results IV

- Instruments for medium conflict situation (amber stage)
 - Analysis of conflict and actors' interests, values and preferences
 - Public hearings or public office hours
 - Data collection on exposure in critical areas
 - Establishment of a communication platform with major stakeholders (exchange and dialogue)
 - If necessary, public town meeting for presenting results

Preliminary Results V

- Instruments for high conflict situations (red phase)
 - Analysis of conflict and actors' interests, values and preferences
 - Systematic collection of concerns
 - Round table or citizen forum
 - Inclusion of alternate sites that are technically feasible
 - Exposure measurements at proposed sites
 - Recommendations of participatory group(s)
 - Public town meeting for presenting results

Online Guidance Document

- Will give recommendations for the appropriate choice and the adequate use of appropriate instruments at the three levels of escalation of the traffic light model
- Will be structured as a flexible toolbox to guarantee a high level of practicability
- Will facilitate understanding of conflict level and assist in choosing the adequate instruments by means of a diagnostic questionnaire
- Will provide background information + contacts: selected and commented links (e.g. existing handbooks, legal information, health), contact persons from providers, DStGB, Clearing houses etc.

Aspects Included in the Document

- Diagnostic instrument for identifying site-specific characteristics (,local climate‘)
- Judicial framework
- Technical framework
- Health aspects
- Procedures + instruments for conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution
- Strategies and approaches for each escalation level
- Methods for evaluating success or failure
- Contact points, addresses and web-links

Conclusions I

- EMF risks tend to remain an issue of public concern even if the majority of the population perceives the benefit of this technology outweigh the potential risks
- A major cause for conflict is the procedure of siting transmitter stations
- Instruments are available to prevent, mitigate or resolve conflicts about siting transmitter stations
- In order to make these instruments become effective one needs a diagnostic tool to characterize the situation and to tailor the instruments to the requirements of the specific situation

Conclusions II

- The project intends to provide a guidance document assisting community officials:
 - To characterize the level of conflict in their community
 - To use the traffic light model for the identification of conflict intensity
 - To design appropriate instruments
 - To evaluate the effectiveness of these instruments
- Major challenges are:
 - Request for an easy-to use, simple manual for dealing with a complex problem
 - Division of labor and duties among and between administrators, politics, providers, and stakeholders
 - Lack of technical and legal expertise in small communities
 - Uniqueness of each situation

Quote

- What man desires is not knowledge but certainty
Bertrand Russel
- Scientific research and risk communication cannot produce certainty but can help people to develop coping mechanisms to deal prudently with the necessary uncertainty that is required for societies to progress