# Between Dialogue and Decision-Making

## Communication and Stakeholder Trust in the Sizewell C Project

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# Between Dialogue and Decision-Making. Communication and Stakeholder Trust in the Sizewell C Project.

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# Abstract

This thesis contributes to research on public trust in large-scale infrastructure projects and energy transitions. It examines this issue through the case of the Sizewell C nuclear energy project in the United Kingdom, focusing on trust in the responsible actor and critically examining how communication efforts and stakeholder engagement initiatives impact local stakeholders' trust through the lens of Susan Senecah's theoretical framework, the Trinity of Voice, which comprises three dimensions: Access, Civic Standing, and Influence. The research is based on qualitative interviews with 11 stakeholders in the vicinity of the Sizewell C site and at its London headquarters. The findings indicate that all three dimensions of the Trinity of Voice are present within the project, although they vary in degree of expression. While multiple communication channels provide stakeholders with *access* to information, and most participants report feeling individually acknowledged *(civic standing)*, the dimension of *influence* remains significantly constrained. Stakeholders frequently perceive their contributions as having minimal impact on decision-making processes, fostering a widespread belief that many decisions are predetermined. Moreover, communication efforts are frequently described as overwhelming or lacking authenticity. Although stakeholders express appreciation for the project's engagement initiatives, these efforts do not consistently foster a sense of inclusivity. In conclusion, the study suggests that, despite some foundational conditions for trust, limited influence and inadequacies in communication significantly undermine trust in the Sizewell C project. To enhance stakeholder trust, it is imperative to adopt more locally tailored and genuine participatory approaches.



*Key words: Nuclear energy, Trust, Acceptability, Sizewell C, Trinity of Voice*

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# 1. Introduction

The town of Leiston, on England's east coast, appears, at first glance, typical of a rural town in the 21st century: quiet, slightly tired, and with an ageing population. Shops, pubs, and cafés are becoming quieter and are closing one by one. Young people look for opportunities and education elsewhere, with many moving to other towns and cities. Despite this, the town experiences a surprising amount of traffic for its size. Many pedestrians wear high-visibility jackets, a constant reminder of the nearby nuclear power stations that have provided employment in the area for the past 60 years.

The industrial presence in the town stands in stark contrast to the surrounding landscape. The countryside surrounding Leiston is renowned for its outstanding natural beauty, an official designation that ensures the area's protection and management (Natural England 2024). The landscape is flat, marked with deer-crossing signs and numerous walking paths. A few kilometres east of Leiston lies a stunning sandy beach facing the North Sea. Overlooking the shoreline are two nuclear power stations: one a large grey concrete block, the other a more modern structure painted in blue, topped with a large, slightly dystopian dome. A few metres from the newer building, construction fencing encloses a vast area stripped of vegetation, and if you listen carefully, you can hear the distant sound of machinery laying the foundations for a new generation of nuclear energy.

## 1.1 Problem statement

Nuclear energy is making a comeback in both the UK and the EU, as many governments seek to reduce energy dependency and enhance domestic energy production (Adler 2026). Electricity generation from renewable energy sources and nuclear power is expected to form the backbone of the UK's energy system by 2030 (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2024a). While nuclear energy is increasingly framed as a key component of a low-carbon energy transition, nuclear infrastructure projects are often associated with local controversy, lengthy planning processes, delays and cost overruns, as well as, concerns regarding environmental impact, safety, and democratic participation (He et al. 2024; Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2025a; Budzier & Maylor 2025).

To increase domestic energy production, the British government has approved the construction of a new major nuclear energy station, Sizewell C, on the east coast of England, near the town of Leiston. Once completed, the project is expected to

supply low-carbon electricity to approximately six million homes and create new employment opportunities in the area (Sizewell C: Building Sizewell C n.d). As Britain undergoes its largest expansion of nuclear energy for 70 years (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2024b), understanding how local communities experience, interpret, and respond to engagement and communication practices is, therefore, increasingly important.

Nuclear accidents, such as the Fukushima disaster in 2011, have contributed to a decline in global public support for nuclear energy, increasing perceptions of risk and fear associated with it (Ryu et al. 2018). Trust is recognised as a crucial element in helping the public feel safer about nuclear energy projects (Ryu et al. 2018). Additionally, studies conducted in China, the Netherlands and South Korea demonstrate that there is a strong correlation between trust and the acceptability of nuclear energy initiatives (Ryu et al. 2018, Liu et al. 2019). The complexity of the technologies and processes involved in energy projects means that the public, often lacking the knowledge or experience to fully understand or manage such initiatives, must rely on responsible actors to implement and oversee them effectively (Liu et al. 2019; Steg 2015). As a result, individuals depend on these responsible actors, such as developers and governments, to shape their perspectives on clean energy transitions (Steg 2015). Trust in these responsible actors and their ability to manage such projects has therefore been shown to play an important role in increasing public acceptability of sustainable energy technologies (Liu et al. 2019), as it significantly affects the perceived costs and benefits of energy transitions (Steg 2015).

While research acknowledges the importance of trust in enhancing the acceptability of energy initiatives, there is a lack of empirical studies investigating how community engagement in nuclear energy projects in the UK facilitates trust and local acceptability. This thesis, therefore, addresses the need to explore community engagement and trust in nuclear energy projects, using the Sizewell C project as a case study. In this context, the analysis focuses specifically on trust in the actor responsible for the project, namely the company Sizewell C, rather than on trust in nuclear technology itself. The Sizewell C project takes pride in its engagement initiatives with the local community, employing a range of communication channels and activities. However, the effectiveness of these efforts in fostering trust and increasing acceptability has not yet been examined in academic research, presenting an ideal opportunity for study.

## 1.2 Purpose and research statement

The UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasises the importance of responsive and inclusive participation, as outlined in Goal 16, which advocates

for representative decision-making at all levels (United Nations General Assembly 2015). As a result, collaborative processes have become increasingly desired for effective decision-making and sustainable community development, particularly in environmental planning and management projects (Senecah 2024). Essential to the success of these collaborative efforts is the presence of trust (Senecah 2024).

This research aims to investigate the role of trust in large-scale nuclear energy projects in the UK, with a particular focus on community engagement and communication practices in the Sizewell C project. By employing Susan Senecah's framework, the Trinity of Voice (TOV), this study will analyse how trust manifests within the Sizewell C project. This application of the TOV contributes to the understanding of the framework's relevance and provides valuable insights into its practical use in real-world contexts. In doing so, the study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of the dynamics shaping public trust in responsible actors within large-scale nuclear energy projects, which is particularly relevant given these actors' influence on public acceptance and perceptions of the technology (Liu et al. 2019; Steg 2015). These insights aim to support communication and engagement strategies for future nuclear developments in culturally similar contexts by addressing the following questions:

*Main research question:*

- How do Sizewell C's communication and stakeholder engagement initiatives shape stakeholders' trust in the project?

*Sub-research questions:*

- How do different stakeholders experience Sizewell C's communication and engagement initiatives?
- How do these initiatives reflect the Trinity of Voice dimensions of access, civic standing, and influence?
- Which aspects of these initiatives are perceived to enhance or undermine trust in the project?
- How is the initiative Friends of Sizewell C, and the possibilities for participation that it might offer, understood by local actors?

To make these questions amenable to research, I conducted a field study in February 2026 in Leiston, near the Sizewell C site.

The layout of the thesis is as follows: The Background introduces the topic by providing an overview of nuclear energy development in the UK, including a historical perspective. The Sizewell C case is then introduced, along with

information about the surrounding area and the groups associated with the project. Thereafter, the Conceptual Framework presents and defines the concepts used in analysing the material gathered from the interviews. The Methods chapter addresses ethical considerations and the methodological approach, and reflects on the choice of research methods. The Results chapter presents the findings derived from the interviews, followed by the Discussion, where these findings are examined in greater detail. Lastly, the Conclusion summarises the main findings and offers suggestions for future research.

# 2. Background

This chapter will lay the foundation for this thesis, providing relevant context and introducing essential information to improve the reader's comprehension of the study.

## 2.1 Britain's clean energy transition

In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the UK has been hit by a severe cost-of-living crisis, which largely stems from the country's dependence on insecure and unstable fossil fuel markets (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2024a). Rising living costs have affected the entire population, and the country remains vulnerable to future energy shocks (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2024a). Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, has asserted that cutting the cost of living is her primary focus, a statement that aligns with Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer's remarks made in 2025, which emphasised that every moment spent not addressing the cost of living crisis is a significant opportunity lost (Peachey 2026). In their general election promise, the Labour Party pledged to reduce household energy costs by £300 by 2030 (ibid.). In the government's budget announcement in November 2025, Reeves unveiled a proposal to decrease typical domestic energy bills by £150 annually. Nevertheless, a substantial number of households across the UK continue to face challenges in managing their essential living costs (Peachey 2026).

The government acknowledges dependence on foreign fossil fuels as a significant risk factor and emphasises the need to strengthen resilience by accelerating the transition to clean, domestically produced energy (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2024a). Prime Minister Keir Starmer has placed this at the centre of one of his five missions within his Plan for Change, a plan that sets out key milestones to be reached by the end of this current Parliament, with the goal of delivering clean energy by 2030 (Labour Party n.d). In order to reach this goal, the government have created the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan: A new era of clean electricity (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2024a).

While the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan is presented as a means to permanently reduce energy bills for households and businesses (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2024a), this claim is based on a set of assumptions regarding market conditions, infrastructure costs, and long-term energy pricing. As such, it may reflect a politically appealing framing rather than a guaranteed outcome, particularly given that nuclear infrastructure is prone to cost overruns

and delays (Budzier & Maylor 2025). Moreover, the plan intends to revitalise the country's industrial heartlands by creating quality jobs (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2024a). This ambition is already reflected in the construction of the nuclear energy station Hinkley Point C, which, at peak construction, employs approximately 26,000 workers across the UK (EDF Energy 2025).

## 2.2 Nuclear energy

A central step in the British government's Clean Power 2030 Action Plan is the investment in new nuclear power stations (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2024a), such as Sizewell C and Hinkley Point C. Electricity generation from nuclear power is becoming an increasingly crucial element of the UK's transition to a more domestic, resilient, and low-carbon energy system (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2024a).

Nuclear power stations generate approximately 25% of low-carbon electricity globally (Galindo 2025). Nuclear energy is considered a clean and low-carbon energy source, as the stations do not emit greenhouse gases during operation (ibid.). Nuclear power stations generate energy through nuclear fission (ibid.). This process occurs when the nucleus of a uranium atom is struck by a neutron, causing it to split into smaller nuclei. In doing so, additional neutrons are released, which can then collide with other uranium atoms and initiate a chain reaction. This process releases a significant amount of energy in the form of heat and radiation. The heat is used to vaporise a cooling agent, typically water, producing steam. The steam is then used to spin turbines that generate electricity (Galindo 2025).

## 2.3 Historical overview

In 1956, the UK opened the world's first commercial nuclear power station (Matthew & Walker 2022). Over the next four decades after its opening, 17 additional nuclear power stations were constructed (Singh & Ashcroft 2017). The number of stations in the UK peaked in 1988, when 18 were in operation, however, peak nuclear capacity wasn't reached until 1994 (ibid.). The number of decommissioned power stations has since surpassed the number of openings, and capacity has, therefore, decreased (Singh & Ashcroft 2017). Between 2000 and 2021, the share of nuclear energy generated annually decreased from 23% to 14.9%, whereas renewable energy generation increased from 3% to 39.6% over the same period (Matthew & Walker 2022).

Although the UK's push to develop new nuclear energy dates back to 2008, following an announcement by then-Prime Minister Gordon Brown (Cunningham 2025), progress in implementation has been relatively slow. This is exemplified by the nuclear energy station Hinkley Point C, which received its nuclear site licence in 2012 (Office for Nuclear Regulation n.d.) but is not expected to be operational until at least 2030 due to repeated delays (Ambrose 2026). The lengthy process of constructing new nuclear power stations in the UK can be attributed to thorough safety regulations and a shortage of experience and skilled labour after years without nuclear development (American Nuclear Society 2024). Furthermore, as nuclear technology becomes more complex, material-intensive processes have been shown to increase construction, operation, and maintenance costs, thereby causing delays (Portugal-Pereira et al. 2018). Environmental licenses and public acceptability have also been identified as contributing to delays and cost overruns (Portugal-Pereira et al. 2018).

In 2010, Sizewell was recognised as a suitable site for a new energy station by a coalition government formed by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats (Cunningham 2025). The first public consultation was conducted by the French energy company, EDF, in November 2012, prior to any formal planning application (ibid.). Since then, three additional public consultations have been launched, the final of which concluded in September 2019 (ibid.). More than 10,000 Suffolk residents are reported to have participated in the consultations (Cunningham 2025).

Despite the UK's long history with nuclear energy and its commitment to developing the nuclear sector, public support for this energy source remains relatively low. According to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero's annual "Public Attitudes Tracker," a nationwide survey conducted in 2025 found that only 22% of adults in the UK favoured constructing a nuclear power station in their local area, a figure unchanged from the previous year (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2025b). Meanwhile, 37% expressed opposition to local nuclear development, a slight decrease from the previous year (ibid.). The survey also noted a modest reduction in strong opposition, dropping from 24% to 21% (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2025b).

The only nuclear power stations predicted to operate beyond 2035 are Hinkley Point C (Singh & Ashcroft 2017) and Sizewell C, once in operation. Hinkley Point C was commissioned before Sizewell C and is expected to be the first new energy station in the UK in three decades (Matthew & Walker 2022). It, similarly,

to Sizewell C, is being constructed near two existing power stations, both of which have, however, been decommissioned (Mathew & Walker 2022).

Both Hinkley Point C and Sizewell C stand out as illustrative cases of a new generation of nuclear projects, as they are being developed next to existing nuclear power stations. This situates them within an established "nuclear landscape" and reflects broader patterns of path dependency, where historical decisions significantly influence future outcomes (Rosenbloom et al. 2019). Typically, new nuclear projects are located in areas with existing nuclear activity (Bull 2023), and this proximity can impact trust in various ways. In this context, the two nuclear power stations serve as key examples of modern nuclear development in the Global North.

## 2.4 Sizewell C

### 2.4.1 About the project

Sizewell C is a nuclear energy station being built in Suffolk, on the east coast of England (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2025a). Once completed, the nuclear energy station is projected to generate enough electricity to power six million British homes for at least 60 years (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2025a). Additionally, the project could support up to 10,000 jobs during construction and 900 jobs once in operation (Cunningham 2025; Sizewell C: Building Sizewell C n.d.). The project aims to deliver economic, social, and environmental benefits to Suffolk (Sizewell C: Friends of Sizewell C n.d.).

The nuclear project reflects the British government's ambitions to meet its Clean Power target, aiming to have 95% of the UK's power produced by clean energy sources by 2030 (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2024a). Clean energy sources currently account for approximately 60% of the UK's energy (ibid.). The British government is determined to secure affordable, homegrown energy, provided mostly by renewable energy sources, and to portray nuclear power as a "backbone of vital firm low carbon power" (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2024a).

The site of the Sizewell C nuclear energy station lies just off Sizewell beach, close to the town of Leiston (Cunningham 2025). The energy station will be built next to the existing nuclear power stations, Sizewell A and Sizewell B, and will therefore make use of existing infrastructure in the area (Sizewell C: Building Sizewell C n.d.). Sizewell A was opened in 1967 and stopped generating electricity in 2006 (Cunningham 2025). It is currently being decommissioned,

enabling the use of 15,000 tonnes of recycled concrete from Sizewell A in the Sizewell C project (Sizewell C: Sizewell C to reuse over 15,000 tonnes of recycled concrete from Sizewell A in major sustainability agreement 2025). Sizewell B has been in operation since 1995 (Cunningham 2025). Since Sizewell B, no new nuclear power stations have been opened in the UK (Cunningham 2025).

The construction of the Sizewell C nuclear energy station represents a significant environmental planning and management issue. Unlike other energy facilities, nuclear power stations must contend with safety risks posed by the radioactive waste they generate over their operational lifespans, necessitating long-term management strategies (Greenberg 2024).

The long-term commitments and technical complexities associated with nuclear development necessitate a strong focus on building trust in the institutions and responsible actors to increase public acceptability (Ryu et al. 2018; Steg 2015). This understanding of trust raises important questions. Does trust lead to reduced public criticism or even result in "blind trust," where individuals believe in someone or something without evaluating their trustworthiness (Stosny 2014)? Additionally, we should consider whether this form of trust allows for critical engagement.

These questions can be examined further through an agonistic perspective on dialogue, which views conflict as a productive force and considers consensus an unrealistic goal that inevitably requires exclusion (Maddison 2015). This perspective would instead argue that the technological complexity and long-term implications of nuclear power development necessitate active public scrutiny and critical engagement. By adopting such a perspective, one can facilitate meaningful engagement that moves beyond mere acceptability, empowering the public to challenge underlying assumptions and hold responsible actors accountable. Sizewell C's focus on public engagement initiatives, therefore, makes it a compelling case for examining not only whether such practices increase public trust and acceptability, but also what kind of trust they produce.

*Figure 1: The Sizewell C construction site (own photo)*

### 2.4.2 Suffolk

The Suffolk region, located on the east coast of England, serves as a major hub for the UK's new energy infrastructure, particularly through its emphasis on large-scale nuclear initiatives, such as Sizewell C, and offshore wind initiatives (Suffolk Wildlife Trust n.d.). These projects are designated as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) and, due to their importance to the nation, are overseen by the government's Planning Inspectorate rather than local council planning authorities (Suffolk Wildlife Trust n.d.).

### 2.4.3 Leiston

The town of Leiston, located along the Suffolk coast, is just a short 10-minute drive from the Sizewell nuclear site and one of the county's most cherished beaches (Leiston Town Council n.d.). With a population of approximately 6,000 people (Leiston Town Council n.d.), Leiston offers a small variety of cafes, restaurants, and shops, including a larger supermarket. Residents can also enjoy amenities such as a library, a leisure centre, and a film theatre. The high street is home to the local Sizewell C information office.

Leiston takes pride in its rich engineering and industrial heritage, as well as its stunning natural surroundings (Leiston Town Council n.d.). Historically, the town served as a focal point during Suffolk's industrial revolution, but it now positions itself at the heart of Suffolk's Green Revolution, playing a significant role in the UK's transition to net zero (Leiston Town Council n.d.).


*Figure 2: Sizewell C's information office in Leiston (own photo)*

### 2.4.4 Funding

The Sizewell C project is owned by the company Sizewell C Limited (Sizewell C: Terms & Conditions 2025), which is referred to in this thesis simply as Sizewell C. Securing investment for the project began in 2010, when it was first earmarked for new nuclear development (Ambrose 2025). Originally, the project was intended to be funded by a partnership with the state-owned China General Nuclear (CGN) and the French energy giant EDF (Brown 2022). This changed when the UK government bought out CGN, amid security concerns and rising geopolitical tensions (Ambrose 2025; Brown 2022).

In June 2025, the British government committed over £14 billion to building Sizewell C, making it the first majority British-owned nuclear power station in over three decades (Sizewell C: A New Nuclear Power Station for Britain n.d.). In July 2025, the government confirmed a Final Investment Decision, securing full funding for the project, following a capital-raising process that began in September 2023 (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2025a).

### 2.4.5 The consultation process

The consultation process for Sizewell C unfolded across four stages (Sizewell C: Sizewell C consultations n.d.). The first stage took place from November 2012 to February 2013, engaging directly with over 4,000 local residents and generating 1,298 responses (ibid.). This stage included exhibitions, drop-in sessions, and meetings with residents, businesses, and organisations (ibid.). The second stage,

which ran from November 2016 to February 2017, featured public exhibitions and presentations to schools, community groups, and parish councils, yielding over 1,000 responses. The third stage occurred from January to March 2019 and involved meetings with nearly 7,000 people across 100 events. During this time, the consultation website received over 32,000 visits. The fourth stage of the public consultation, which concluded in September 2019, saw participation from over 1,000 individuals and included 10 weeks of events, exhibitions, and meetings.

In May 2020, the planning application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) to build and operate Sizewell C was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate. Following stakeholder feedback, changes to the DCO were accepted in April 2021 to improve the plans and minimise impacts on the local community and environment. Throughout these consultations, Sizewell C has emphasised its commitment to listening to feedback from local communities and stakeholders (Sizewell C: Sizewell C consultations n.d.).

### 2.4.6 Friends of Sizewell C

Friends of Sizewell C is a group established by Sizewell C for Suffolk residents who support the project and wish to have their voices heard (Sizewell C: Friends of Sizewell C n.d.). “Friends” receive project updates and, according to the website, are invited to participate in exclusive events and meetings with staff and stakeholders to gain deeper insights into the project’s community benefits and to represent community interests (ibid.). Additionally, the initiative is presented as a means of connecting the community with the project, allowing members to share accurate information, meet new people, and get to know the staff (ibid.). The network currently has more than 1,000 local members (Sizewell C: Friends of Sizewell C n.d.).

### 2.4.7 Stop Sizewell C

In 2013, the group Theberton and Eastbridge Action Group on Sizewell was established to protect the local environment and highlight how the local community would be affected by the construction of Sizewell C (Stop Sizewell C n.da). The group didn’t originally oppose Sizewell C but, due to insufficient engagement with EDF, opted to campaign against the project. Since 2020, the group has been campaigning under the name Stop Sizewell C (Stop Sizewell C n.da). The group has a Facebook group with over 6,000 followers, dedicated to posting updates and raising awareness (Stop Sizewell C n.db).


*Figure 3: Stop Sizewell C poster (own photo)*

### 2.4.8 Our Heritage 2040

In January 2020, the Our Heritage 2040 project was launched, inspired by the Sizewell Community Working Group and supported by Sizewell C (Jericho Chambers 2020). Comprising local residents and employers, the group envisions a future for the Suffolk Coastal area focused on optimism, innovation, and creativity. The project has produced two independent publications, one in 2020 and another in 2024, featuring essays from the working group. Its goal is to foster dialogue among stakeholders such as business leaders, politicians, and local communities, addressing the tensions often arising from infrastructure projects, particularly in nuclear energy (Jericho Chambers 2020).

# 3. Conceptual Framework

This chapter outlines and justifies the theoretical frameworks employed to analyse the materials gathered for this study. It begins by defining the concept of trust and subsequently introduces the Trinity of Voice framework, which is used to foster trust in environmental planning and management projects. Following this, the chapter will define the terms Bruksanda and Sacrifice zones. These concepts will later be revisited in the discussion chapter to examine how a history of nuclear energy infrastructure may shape trust, and how large-scale infrastructure projects of national significance may affect local populations' perceptions of their ability to influence developments in their area.

## 3.1 Trust

The complexity of nuclear energy technology creates conditions in which the public, often lacking technical knowledge, relies on responsible actors to implement and oversee such projects (Liu et al. 2019; Steg 2015). The management and actions of these actors shape public trust in them and, in turn, influence how the technology is perceived and accepted (Liu et al. 2019; Steg 2015). Trust is, therefore, vital for fostering public acceptability and support for nuclear energy, as it plays a significant role in helping people feel more secure about such projects (Ryu et al. 2018).

Trust is also considered essential for democratic participation, which in turn legitimises institutions and supports the shared direction that gives cohesion to society (Cook 2024). It is deemed especially important as governments transition towards more sustainable, net-zero futures (ibid.). However, research indicates that the UK public has relatively low trust in the government's ability to deliver major infrastructure projects (Cook 2024). I find this relevant in the case of Sizewell C, given that a substantial share of the project is owned by the UK Government. Accordingly, this thesis examines trust within the project, with a specific focus on trust in the responsible actor, namely, the company Sizewell C.

The construction of Sizewell C is occurring amid a global decline in public trust in government leaders (Hosking 2019). Given this ongoing crisis in public trust, it is crucial for the British government to foster trust, fulfil its commitments, and ensure public acceptability regarding Sizewell C. By effectively addressing these concerns, the project has the potential to serve as a model for future large-scale nuclear initiatives in the UK.

There is extensive research on trust in collaborative processes and organisations, however, there is still no consensus on a single agreed-upon definition (Senecah, 2024; Pytlik-Zillig & Kimbrough, 2015). This thesis uses the frequently cited definition of trust proposed by Mayer et al. (1995, p. 712), which defines it as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party.". In an effort to simplify this definition, Senecah (2024, p. 2094) translates it into plain language, defining it as: "I choose to believe that in this process, you will act with integrity, benevolence, and ability, and will fulfill commitments you make as will I; therefore, I will be honest with you about my interests and will respect yours". Furthermore, Senecah (2024) cites Vaske et al. (2007), suggesting that trust stems from shared experiences, the assumption of shared values, meaningful relationships, charisma, common activities, and active listening.

Trust is further explored in a comparative study examining the acceptability of renewable energy projects across two distinct cultural contexts, one in China, characterised by a collectivist culture, and the other in the Netherlands, which embodies an individualistic culture (Liu et al. 2019). Liu et al. (2019) focus specifically on solar energy initiatives. Both locations have prior experience in the development of renewable energy projects (ibid.). The primary objective of the study was to examine how factors such as trust in the organisations managing energy projects and the extent of public participation in major decisions (e.g., project size and location) versus minor decisions (e.g., facility design) influence public acceptability of these projects (Liu et al. 2019).

The study's findings suggested that, in both countries, higher levels of trust in responsible organisations, combined with greater influence over major decisions, significantly increased project acceptability (Liu et al. 2019). In contrast, public acceptability was notably diminished when individuals expressed low trust in the responsible organisation and were restricted to influencing only minor decisions (ibid.). The research concluded that having either high trust or influence over major decisions was sufficient to increase the overall acceptability of the project, however, the combination of both factors did not lead to additional benefits in the Dutch context compared to having just one. Notably, trust had a stronger influence on acceptability in the Netherlands, while decision-making influence was more impactful in the Chinese context (Liu et al. 2019).

Liu et al. (2019) suggest that trust and influence are universal determinants of project acceptability and emphasise their importance in facilitating the successful implementation of renewable energy projects. Furthermore, they highlight the

need to involve the public in major decisions as a strategy to enhance acceptability and gradually rebuild trust, particularly when initial trust in the energy company or government is minimal (Liu et al. 2019).

Although Sizewell C is not a renewable energy project, it aims to accelerate the UK's transition to clean energy, similar to renewable initiatives. This thesis draws on the study by Liu et al. to assess and reflect on the public acceptability of Sizewell C. The UK and the Netherlands share significant cultural similarities, and the UK is often characterised as an individualistic culture (Government of the Netherlands n.d., Lamb et al. 2020). Using this study as a reference point, I aim to identify parallels between my findings and the results from the Netherlands, with the goal of understanding how to enhance acceptability and build trust.

## 3.2 Trinity of Voice

Susan Senecah describes trust as both a driver and a reward of effective collaboration, built through relationships developed via dialogue and interaction (Senecah 2024). The success or failure of collaborative processes is determined by the perceived presence of trust, which either facilitates or denies participants' voices. Despite the widespread recognition of the importance of trust, Senecah (2024) emphasises the lack of concrete guidance on how to build and sustain it in collaborative settings. Senecah's Trinity of Voice (TOV) is therefore introduced as a practical framework for designing collaborative processes that foster productive, high-trust relationships in environmental planning and management (Senecah 2024).

William Schutz's theory of Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO) provides the foundation for the TOV (Senecah 2024). Schutz's theory comprises three dimensions of interpersonal relations, aimed at explaining human interaction and providing a clearer understanding of human behaviour (Blackman n.d.). According to Schutz, all humans share a basic need to feel significant, competent, and likeable (ibid.). These basic needs manifest across three levels of interaction: Behaviour, Feelings, and Self-concept. These levels are interdependent, as behaviour is motivated by self-concept, and self-concept reflects how we feel about ourselves and others. Within each of these three levels, there are three additional areas of concern: Inclusion, Control, and Openness. By achieving the right balance of Inclusion, Control, and Openness, we feel significant, competent, and likeable, which results in a satisfying Self-concept (Blackman n.d.).

Schutz's research, focusing on small teams, shows that satisfying each individual's three basic needs increases trust (Senecah 2024). The TOV adapts and applies Schutz's basic needs to community-scale collaborative processes (ibid.). On a community scale, Inclusion becomes Access, Openness becomes Civic Standing, and Control becomes Influence. According to Senecah, these three interdependent dimensions are essential for fostering effective public participation and representing "voice," i.e., the capacity of participants to have a meaningful, trust-rich, and effective role in collaborative processes (Senecah 2024).

The Trinity of Voice's first dimension, Access, provides the potential for "voice" by creating appropriate starting conditions for participation (Senecah 2024). Creating a safe and inclusive space through shared norms and procedures fosters a sense of capacity to participate (ibid.). It creates a favourable environment for the development of basic social capital (ibid.). The logistics and processes need to be intentionally designed to make participation easier and ensure people can actually take part. Examples of practical actions to facilitate participation include varied meeting times, on-site childcare, proximity to public transportation, and the layout of the meeting room (Senecah 2024).

The second dimension, Civic Standing, involves demonstrating that participants and their contributions are respected and honoured (Senecah 2024). The dimension includes specific actions that show participant input counts and reinforce respect for diverse perspectives and process products (ibid.). Civic Standing often appears close to, or simultaneous with, Access, but, according to Senecah (2024), it is more difficult to provide. Civic Standing involves ensuring that actions are implemented to make participants feel that their contributions count throughout the collaborative process and afterwards (Senecah 2024).

Lastly, Influence assures that the participants' contributions are reflected in the decision-making process (Senecah 2024). Senecah (2024) argues that influence is the most overlooked aspect of public engagement and is difficult for conveners to achieve. Research indicates that failing to incorporate public contributions and creating a sense of being lectured by officials are the fastest ways to erode public confidence, trust and undermine the legitimacy of the process (Senecah 2024).

Senecah (2024) argues that by intentionally designing and monitoring a process that addresses the TOV's three dimensions, conveners can foster trust-rich relationships essential to the productive engagement with complex and contentious environmental planning and management issues. The TOV serves as a

process template and a scorecard for building and maintaining these relationships through communication (Senecah 2024).

By using the TOV to analyse my data, I aim to identify the strengths of Sizewell C's engagement initiatives and communication efforts while also pinpointing areas that could benefit from improvement with the aim of enhancing trust and acceptability. The TOV provides a valuable framework for this study, as it offers a structured and practical approach to stakeholder engagement through its three core dimensions, while also being suitable for application within the study's limited scope and timeframe.

## 3.3 Bruksanda

The old Swedish term Bruksanda, roughly translated as "local industrial spirit", refers to the norms and values that arise from the relationships between a dominant local employer and a close-knit, locally recruited workforce (Forsberg et al. 2001). The term has traditionally been applied to and associated with older industrial communities, particularly mill towns, in Sweden (Homann 2006). Bruksanda stems from a shared interest forged through demands and counter-demands, resulting in the local employer taking responsibility for their employees and employees' families in return for their loyalty (Homann 2006, Forsberg et al. 2001). In the past, when a strong Bruksanda was present, unofficial "employment guarantees" were provided to the male residents of rural communities (Forsberg et al. 2001). Other companies, and potential competitors, were deemed unnecessary (ibid.). The norms and values that arose in such communities consequently diminished local entrepreneurship, despite the actors, i.e., the recruited workforce and the local employer, not always intentionally doing so (Forsberg et al. 2001).

Bruksanda can be applied to the Sizewell C case, particularly given Leiston's history as an industrial community. The nuclear industry, including Sizewell A, B, and soon Sizewell C, has served as the area's largest employer for several decades. By examining the case through the lens of Bruksanda, one can explore how dependency on, and long-standing connections to the nuclear energy industry may shape trust. In particular, it is worth considering whether such historical relationships foster trust in the responsible actor without critical scrutiny, thereby contributing to forms of blind trust. This perspective raises several questions: How do these relationships influence overall trust in the responsible actor? In what ways does community dependency affect individuals' willingness to speak up and express critical views? And, in relation to the Trinity of Voice, how might these dynamics shape the extent to which safe and respectful spaces are created for feedback, including criticism?

## 3.4 Sacrifice Zones

The concept of sacrifice zones was originally associated with livestock management, aimed at balancing economic productivity and ecological sustainability (Juskus 2023). It has since been developed and more broadly applied to various environmental issues (ibid.). Sacrifice zones are defined as geographical areas where environmental harms are concentrated to safeguard the environmental health, sustainability, or economic prosperity of other areas (ibid.). These sacrifice zones represent the tangible manifestation of an abstract "greater good," such as national security, energy independence, or social progress, which deems specific geographical areas and their inhabitants as "sacrificeable" for the benefit of the majority (ibid.). The concept originally highlighted the disproportionate exposure of marginalised and racialised communities to environmental harms (Juskus 2023).

In an article examining the growing resistance to renewable energy projects in southwestern Ontario, Canada, Scott and Smith (2017) argue that new sacrifice zones are emerging as a consequence of “green energy enthusiasm”. Green energy enthusiasm is described as a phenomenon representing the urgent policy drive to demonstrate progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuel dependency (Scott & Smith 2017). The phenomenon has led to large investments in renewable energy sources like wind and solar, as well as the rebranding of controversial large-scale projects, such as hydro dams and nuclear refurbishments, as "green energy" initiatives (ibid.). The new sacrifice zones are emerging in rural areas, often populated by white and middle-class people who perceive themselves as bearing all the risks, such as degraded landscapes and health effects, while the rewards benefit multinational corporations and urban areas (Scott & Smith 2017).

The concept of sacrifice zones offers a useful lens for examining how perceived disruption and risk, justified in the name of the greater good, such as increased domestic energy generation, can shape trust. Applied to the recent expansion of nuclear energy in Europe, it helps highlight how such initiatives are legitimised in areas with a history of nuclear energy. Leiston’s ambition to position itself at the centre of Suffolk’s “Green Revolution” further underscores the relevance of this perspective, as it reflects a narrative of contributing to a broader societal benefit. This perspective raises several questions: In what ways does framing the Sizewell C project as nationally significant influence local perceptions and trust? How does this positioning serve to legitimise decisions and development processes? And how might it affect trust in the responsible actors, particularly when these are partly government-owned?

# 4. Method

The following section states and reflects the methodological choices of this thesis.

## 4.1 Case Selection

My selection of a nuclear project for my master's thesis was shaped by my introduction to the project and key contacts during a conference on nuclear issues, hosted by Business Sweden and the Swedish Embassy in London. The event brought together Swedish and British representatives from industry and government, highlighting shared interest in nuclear energy development between the two countries. It also offered valuable insights into the political significance of the nuclear sector and its contribution to the clean energy transition. The connections I established at the conference enabled me to interview senior staff and identify other relevant interviewees for my research. As I explored the project further, I was struck by its strong emphasis on community benefit and engagement, demonstrated through substantial investment and dedicated communication efforts. The project's commitment to facilitating engagement initiatives and participatory processes, concepts I studied during my bachelor's and master's degrees, further piqued my interest. Sizewell C's approach to community engagement ultimately became the central focus of my research inquiry, sparking my interest in how these initiatives can influence public acceptability and potentially serve as a model for future nuclear projects.

As previously noted, the selection of Sizewell C for my case study was primarily driven by established contacts and a keen interest in their engagement processes. I want to clarify that my research questions were not formulated, nor was the study designed, in response to any requests from these contacts. However, I did obtain relevant contact information for interviewees through them.

## 4.2 Interviews

This thesis adopts a qualitative research design, conducted through in-depth interviews. Qualitative interviews centre on the interviewees' lived experiences and perspectives, facilitating the collection of nuanced, detailed responses (Bryman 2002). The flexibility in directing the conversation allows for insights into what interviewees consider most significant and relevant (Bryman 2002).

The interviews follow a semi-structured format, which provides a flexible framework for exploring relevant topics while allowing follow-up questions and the investigation of new themes that arise during discussions (Kvale 2002). Kvale (2002) characterises qualitative research interviews as "a construction site for knowledge," emphasising the active, reflective, and constitutive role of the interviewer in the knowledge generation process. This interactive, open format is particularly effective at revealing both explicit arguments and interviewees' underlying values and assumptions (Kvale 2002).

Given the thesis's objectives and time constraints, the semi-structured interview format was deemed most appropriate. This method is particularly suitable for generating detailed responses regarding individuals' feelings and opinions. I recognised that the sensitivity of my research topic may evoke strong emotions in some interviewees, underscoring the importance of fostering a trusting relationship with them. While I used interview guides to maintain a structured approach, it remained essential to allow participants the freedom to express their thoughts openly.

The study aimed to interview participants from various stakeholder groups, including residents in Leiston, critics, and Sizewell C employees, to ensure a diverse range of opinions that could contribute multiple perspectives. Interviewees were identified by reaching out to Sizewell C staff members online, including one individual I had previously had contact with. This contact subsequently introduced me to several other employees within the organisation, resulting in snowball sampling. Snowball sampling refers to a method in which one interviewee recommends additional interviewees (Bengtsson et al., 1998). Through this contact, I was introduced to another senior member of the Sizewell C management team who participated in my study.

The majority of participants in my study were recruited via a post in the local Facebook group "Sizewell C Chit Chat". This post invited those interested in sharing their opinions to reach out and specifically encouraged members of the supporter group Friends of Sizewell C to participate in the study, as they were the group I initially aimed to explore. The Facebook post received significant attention, garnering approximately 85 likes and 64 comments, many of which expressed negative sentiment toward the project due to concerns about infrastructure disruptions and environmental impacts. Despite this, none of my interviewees ended up being members of Friends of Sizewell C. One individual claimed to be a member and contacted me via email, expressing a willingness to be interviewed. Unfortunately, this person later ceased all communication,

making it difficult to verify their membership and involvement in the group due to the limited information available.

One participant was identified through communication with the region's prominent opposing organisation, Stop Sizewell C. The group was contacted to collect a variety of perspectives on the issue, and several comments on my Facebook post also suggested making this outreach, thereby contributing to a snowball sampling approach.

In the course of my research, I conducted interviews with 11 participants, comprising 6 men and 5 women. Participants included local residents from various stakeholder groups and project representatives. Table 1 provides an overview of the interview participants and their relation to the project. My interviewees' ages ranged from 18 to around 65. This demographic distribution enabled a diverse exploration of perspectives across age groups. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and audio-recorded with participants' consent. Nine of the interviews were conducted in East Suffolk, in Leiston and the surrounding towns, whereas one interview, organised as a group discussion with two members of the senior management team, took place at Sizewell C's main office in central London.

*Table 1. Overview of interview sample.*

| Interview ID | Stakeholder group | Role/relationship to the project |
|---|---|---|
| I1 | Project representative | Strategy expert at Sizewell C |
| I2 | Stop Sizewell C representative | Opponent |
| I3 | Project representative | Community relations team |
| I4 | Local resident | Resident in the project area |
| I5 | Local resident | Employee at Sizewell B |
| I6 | Local resident | Participant in Our Heritage 2040 |
| I7 | Local resident | District councillor |
| I8 | Project representative | Sizewell C management team |
| I9 | Local resident | Employee at Sizewell B |
| I10 | Project representative | Apprentice at Sizewell C |
| I11 | Local resident | Local business owner |

## 4.3 Data processing and analysis

The interview data was processed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method (Ahmed et al. 2025). The framework identifies six steps: (1) familiarisation with data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) writing the report

(ibid.). This method enables the systematic identification of meaningful perspectives, recurring arguments, narratives, and counterarguments in interviewees' statements while keeping the researcher actively engaged with the data during processing (Ahmed et al. 2025).

All interview recordings were transcribed using Microsoft Word's transcription feature. The transcriptions were subsequently reviewed and corrected to address any errors made by the transcription service. Following this, the transcriptions were analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method. Codes were developed in relation to the Trinity of Voice framework, encompassing the dimensions of Access, Civic Standing, and Influence. Themes were then identified within each dimension based on recurring patterns in the data.

Access was operationalised to encompass the conditions under which individuals gained information about Sizewell C and the entry points for participating in initiatives. This dimension also examined how communication efforts were received and understood. Civic Standing was operationalised by assessing the extent to which individuals felt respected and listened to by Sizewell C. Influence focused on the individuals' perceptions of their ability to make an impact, including concrete examples in which feedback was reflected in project-related outcomes.

Coding involved a careful review of each transcription, with relevant words and sentences colour-coded according to their connection to each dimension. The codes were subsequently categorised by dimension, with some codes fitting into multiple dimensions. The analysis was illustrated in three tables, each representing one of the Trinity of Voice's dimensions. These tables were subsequently synthesised into a single summary table.

## 4.4 Limitations of the study

The choice of the Sizewell C project limits my findings to the surrounding community, which is a unique geographical context given that it has had two nuclear power stations in close proximity prior to Sizewell C. The results may therefore be difficult to generalise to the country and to northern Europe as a whole.

Although two individuals were interviewed prior to the field trip to Leiston, most of the research material was collected during the trip. The field trip lasted six days, from a Tuesday to a Sunday in late February. The length of stay was determined by time and budget constraints. Another limitation was the lack of

public transport to and from the area. The length of stay was therefore also determined by how long I could borrow a family member's car.

It is important to consider the potential impact of both the respondent's and the interviewer's perspectives, past experiences, and biases when interpreting responses and analysing the results. As noted in Section 3.2 on Interviews, most participants were recruited through a Facebook group. I chose this approach because I did not have prior connections in Leiston, and it was an effective way to find interviewees within the given timeframe. However, this method carries the risk that those who choose to engage may hold strong opinions, whether in favour of or against the project. Therefore, it is essential to be aware of the implications this may have had on my findings, as they cannot be considered wholly representative of the entire community.

## 4.5 Ethics

This thesis adheres to the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, which comprises four fundamental principles: Reliability, Honesty, Respect, and Accountability (ALLEA 2023).

The principle of Reliability emphasises the need to ensure the quality of research practices (ALLEA 2023). In alignment with this principle, this thesis has been carefully executed, with deliberate attention to design and preparation, particularly in developing the interview guide and in the careful use of resources. The selection of methodology and the subsequent analytical processes have employed well-justified, empirically validated methods deemed appropriate for the scope and aims of this research.

Honesty refers to the obligation of articulating research findings transparently, fairly, and without bias (ALLEA 2023). This thesis has been careful in analysing interview data, ensuring that quotes and information are not decontextualised. All sources and contributions from interviewees have been accurately cited, with due recognition afforded to all contributors. Moreover, this principle has been practised in the disclosure of reflexivity, as elaborated in section 4.6.

Respect involves a researcher's obligation to acknowledge and honour the various stakeholders engaged in the research, including non-human stakeholders such as the environment and cultural contexts (ALLEA 2023). This thesis has operationalised this principle by engaging with interview participants thoughtfully and adhering to established ethical guidelines. The consent and information forms signed by interviewees provided options for citation, allowing individuals to

choose between direct citation (when their name and title were deemed important to the context) and a pseudonym. Additionally, the interview audio recordings have been securely stored in an encrypted format and are accessible only to the researcher to protect the interviewees' personal data and integrity. The recordings will be deleted according to an established time frame. Participants were informed of the storage duration and how their data would be handled in the consent and information form. Furthermore, the environment and community visited during the field trip were treated with the highest regard and subjected to minimal disturbance.

The final principle, Accountability, encompasses the researcher's responsibility for the entire research project, from conception to publication (ALLEA 2023). This accountability is partly achieved by strictly adhering to established codes of conduct. It is further facilitated by the oversight of a supervisor, a professor affiliated with the Division of Environmental Communication at SLU, who has experience conducting research in the UK.

## 4.6 Positionality and Reflexivity

In considering my positionality, it is important to note that my upbringing in Sweden has shaped my comprehension of this issue. I have never lived near a nuclear energy station and, prior to conducting this study, had not encountered one with my own eyes. This lack of direct experience has influenced my understanding of the implications of residing near such facilities and has affected my ability to relate to the participants I interviewed who live near nuclear power stations.

Furthermore, my perspective on nuclear energy is also influenced by historical events. I was not yet born during the Chernobyl and Harrisburg disasters, which are among the most significant incidents in the history of nuclear energy. Additionally, I was too young to grasp the full scope of the Fukushima disaster in 2011. As a result, I have not witnessed these catastrophic events firsthand, nor have I personally experienced the associated anxieties that many individuals likely felt during those crises. This lack of direct exposure has, therefore, profoundly influenced my understanding of nuclear energy and its implications.

As a student with a Bachelor's degree in Rural Development and currently pursuing a Master's degree in Environmental Communication and Management at SLU, I approach this topic through a social science lens. While my academic background has not specifically addressed nuclear energy, I recognise that my exposure to critical perspectives on such initiatives, particularly from an

environmental standpoint, has significantly shaped my viewpoint. My studies, which have primarily focused on sustainability, also influence my assessment of nuclear energy projects in rural areas through the three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental.

Prior to conducting my research, I had no established relationship with the participants, having encountered only one of my interviewees briefly at a conference. Given my limited technical knowledge of nuclear energy, my lack of experience living near nuclear facilities, and my lack of prior relationship with the participants, I believe my interviewees perceived me as an outsider and a student. This perception may have influenced both my approach and confidence during the interviews, as well as interviewees' willingness to share their insights, especially given the lack of prior trust or connection.

In examining power dynamics in my research, my limited understanding of nuclear energy and unfamiliarity with the specific context under study likely shaped the power dynamics at play. The staff members I interviewed possessed greater depth of knowledge regarding both nuclear energy and the relevant context, thereby positioning them in a more authoritative role in the selection of information they shared with me. The community participants I engaged with had diverse educational backgrounds, particularly given the area's demographics, which are characterised by fewer individuals with higher educational qualifications. This likely affected power dynamics by shaping their perceptions of me and their self-perceptions. As a university student, my institutional affiliation from a foreign university (although my accent was recognised as English) could further affect how participants perceived me. This combination of knowledge, educational background, institutional affiliation, and socioeconomic factors emphasises the complexities rooted in the power dynamics in my research.

Although I interviewed a fairly balanced number of women and men overall, I observed a notable absence of young female perspectives in my data. While I'm not certain of the exact reasons for this gap, one possible explanation is the male dominance in the nuclear energy sector. Additionally, younger women may be more likely to use other social media platforms than Facebook, which was my primary method for recruiting participants.

# 5. Findings

In the following chapter, I will present the findings derived from my interviews and field observations. The first section will focus on contextual observations and insights gathered during my field trip to Leiston. This will highlight key impressions and recurring concerns that emerged, helping to provide a clearer understanding of the context of engagement and local public opinion regarding Sizewell C. Following this, I will organise and present the findings in accordance with Senecah's Trinity of Voice: Access, Civic Standing, and Influence. The thematic analysis will be summarised in a table, followed by a concluding section that discusses cross-dimensional patterns.

## 5.1 Contextual observations and insights from the field trip

During my field study in Leiston, it became evident that residents are not necessarily opposed to nuclear energy itself but are primarily concerned about the project's unexpected disruptions. Numerous energy projects under development in Suffolk have been perceived as causing significant disruption and discontent among residents. Some interviewees described these projects as uncoordinated, leading to unnecessary and widespread roadworks and continuous destruction of nature. Consequently, Sizewell C has sometimes been unfairly blamed for disturbances that are not directly attributable to it.

In addition to the disruption caused by, for example, roadworks, another local concern appears to be the rising housing and rental prices, which have increased significantly. Properties are being purchased by private companies and landlords who see the opportunity to profit once construction of Sizewell C is in full swing. This has resulted in young people struggling to afford to stay in the local area. Although Sizewell C is not directly involved in property purchases, and the power to address this issue seems to be beyond its control, the project still faces considerable criticism for allowing the situation to unfold.

For young people, Sizewell C presents a potential opportunity. It offers them the chance to secure employment and live in a region many love for its outstanding natural beauty. The college Sizewell C has committed to building and establishing is regarded by many of my interviewees as the project's most significant community benefit.

## 5.2 Trinity of Voice

In the following section, I have categorised my findings according to the three dimensions of Senecah's (2024) Trinity of Voice. The information presented in this section is derived from the interviews with 11 stakeholders conducted for the purposes of this study. As illustrated in Table 2, all three dimensions are present in the Sizewell C project.

*Table 2: Summary of findings based on thematic analysis*

| TOV-dimension | Findings |
|---|---|
| Access | + Opportunities for participation through a wide variety of themed events and meetings, access to communication via multiple (physical and digital) channels, and a few practical barriers.<br><br>- Communication perceived as overly corporate, perceived event exclusivity, limited understanding of the project's scale during the formal consultation process, formal forum talking time limited to parish and town councillors, Friends of Sizewell C not widely known. |
| Civic Standing | + Voices are respected and recognised, local staff empathise, feedback is seen by senior members of staff, and a quick response to inquiries is provided.<br><br>- Power relations, underestimation of local knowledge (employment of external consultants), unequal speaking time during forums, technical complexity, and administrative processes create barriers. |
| Influence | + Feedback led to minor influence; feedback post Sizewell B influenced decisions; quick responses to inquiries; and themed events and meetings continue to take place despite formal consultation being over.<br><br>- No major influence in project decisions, all major decisions perceived as predetermined, and a feeling of powerlessness. |

### 5.2.1 Access

The Trinity of Voice's first dimension, Access, establishes the starting conditions for participation by creating favourable circumstances for participation to happen (Senecah 2024). The following section of this chapter will identify factors that constitute, support, and hinder the Access dimension, based on my interviews.

My findings suggest that Senecah's first dimension, Access, is strongly present in the Sizewell C project. Interviewees described several opportunities for engagement, including public forums, events and informal meetings, which subsequently present opportunities for participation and attract a diverse audience. When asked whether the interviewees had attended any of the engagement initiatives, whether formal or informal, most had participated in at least one. Their reasons for participation varied widely, with some seeming eager to influence the

project and oversee its progress, while others appeared to participate purely for enjoyment.

Participation and speaking time during the official community forums, which cover different topics, were described by several interviewees as formally limited to parish and town councillors. According to interviewees, the public is allowed to attend but not to ask questions. If a member of the public wishes to raise a question, they would need to go via their parish or town councillor. Despite this, several interviewees noted that efforts have been made to make the community forums more inclusive and interactive for the public.

Interviewees emphasised the many physical and digital communication channels used by the project, enabling access to information. The project uses a wide range of channels to engage with the public, including postal letters, magazines, social media, local newspapers, radio, school visits, live events, and a presence on various websites. Despite employees from Sizewell C affirming that residents value this diverse array of communication methods, several interviewees perceived the materials as artificial and overwhelming, ultimately producing the opposite effect and impeding access. One interviewee remarked:

> [...] it doesn't feel like there is a way to openly communicate. I know they do host little conferences, but everything's very, very PR-checked, trained, diplomatic, and political, almost. Whereas I think people, especially people around here, out in the country, people just want straight conversations. They just want straight answers. (I4)[1]

This experience was also shared by a Sizewell B employee, who said:

> They've [Sizewell C] invested massively into journalism, kind of like media stuff, so there's a lot of videographers, marketing, HR, all of this stuff. And yet I don't think it's working. I think it's working somewhat, at a national level, but then that defeats the purpose of supporting the local area. I don't think it's working on the locals at all, frankly. (I5)

A local business owner described a disconnect between Sizewell C's communication intentions and local perceptions, saying:

> People don't understand… cannot align, can't even understand or align to what they're [Sizewell C] trying to do. All they're seeing is the damage and

[1] Numbers in brackets refer to interviewees (e.g. I1, I2), see Table 1 for an overview of participants.

> the disruption. So, you know, the alignment comes from understanding and knowledge. (I11)

Several participants reported limited prior understanding of the extent of disruption caused by the project, and expressed shock, suspicion, and speculation. This was illustrated when one interviewee stated:

> They [Sizewell B] didn't do nearly as much as this. Why is this one requiring control of the entire county? It doesn't make sense to me. And the only… I'm going to go really conspiracy theory on this… is that they must be laying the groundwork for D as well. That's my theory, because I can't think of any other reason they'd need so much land. (I4)

Access is notably improved by the presence of the Sizewell C information office, which has been well-received and valued by the community. One employee noted, "One of the nice things we hear from people is they like that they can just come in here and ask us." (I3). The office is open Monday to Friday between 9:30 and 17:00. However, as these hours coincide with standard working hours, access may be limited for individuals in full-time employment. Another barrier to participation regarding Access is that engagement opportunities are largely concentrated in Leiston, with facilities such as the information office perceived by interviewees from neighbouring towns as being somewhat out of their way.

Moreover, the timing of engagement opportunities, such as forums and events, appeared unfavourable for shift workers at Sizewell B, as they were mostly scheduled in the afternoons and evenings. However, the two Sizewell B employees interviewed expressed little perceived need to attend the more informational events. When asked about their lack of attendance, one participant explained: "Because I support nuclear anyway… I mean because I've worked there I understand that it's like a needed requirement for the country…" (I9).

Certain events organised by Sizewell C are perceived as exclusive, despite being marketed as "public." For instance, the Leiston Film Festival, marketed as a community event showcasing films that celebrate the local area, was reportedly attended almost entirely by Sizewell employees and London-based stakeholders. Furthermore, tickets for the event were described as unavailable, making it difficult for anyone not affiliated with the project to participate. An interviewee referred to the event as a "propaganda festival", explaining that all the showcased films were produced by Sizewell C and served primarily to promote the Sizewell C project. They continued by saying:

> When no one in the area knows about it, and no one in the area has submitted any films, it's not a Leiston Film Festival. It's a company-driven propaganda machine. And it just really fell flat for me, because no one even knew about this. And all the people there were people who were involved with Sizewell, who either worked at that one or had come down from London, you know? It was not what it was in the name. And the company that they used to make all these films was from London. But we've got several good video production companies in the area. And then they had that same video production company taking pictures at this event, where their trained [local] photography team was. (I4)

Another example that surfaced during my field trip is a community choir in Leiston, initiated by Sizewell C, which, according to another interviewee, was similarly dominated by employees, despite being open to the public. These findings suggest potential limitations in Access, particularly for residents without affiliations to the nuclear energy industry.

Regarding the supporter group, Friends of Sizewell C, which my study initially aimed to explore, the majority of my interviewees were aware of its existence but were not affiliated with it, nor did they know anyone who was. The only two individuals who could provide insights and information about the group and its purpose were themselves, employees of Sizewell C.

### 5.2.2 Civic Standing

The TOV's second dimension, Civic Standing, indicates how people's voices are recognised and respected. The following section of this chapter will identify factors that constitute, support, and hinder the dimension of Civic Standing based on my interviews.

The dimension's presence is strengthened, as with Access, by the permanent information office in Leiston, which, according to interviewees, allows residents to ask questions and speak with employees without booking an appointment. Several respondents noted that employees at the information office live locally, with one describing that they, therefore, demonstrate an understanding of the local context and have personal relationships with many residents. Employees were described as frequently facing similar experiences and could easily connect with feedback and opinions about, e.g., road closures and other disruptions, because they too have to navigate these challenges in their daily lives.

According to a representative of the Sizewell C community relations team, the information office strives to respond to inquiries within 5 days, despite the official

response target being set at 10 days in the Development Consent Order (DCO). Additionally, all feedback and inquiries received by the information office can be read anonymously by senior employees in the London office. This was described as helping them to stay up to date on local concerns and hold local employees accountable.

The Our Heritage 2040 project, which brought together different stakeholders in a publication, was described by one interviewee as featuring likeable community representatives who'd had an appreciated influence on the community. The participants were asked to brainstorm ideas for various projects that could benefit the local community. One interviewee who took part in the project described the initiative as strategic. In regard to the disruption and criticism Sizewell C has faced, they said:

> They [Sizewell C] anticipated it, they put the right people in the room to come up with ideas, and they almost did it like a domino game, so that the minute they started building, money could go to the different causes. So they mitigated the negative news with the positive news. (I6)

The local information office and the Our Heritage 2040 Project, thereby, appear to support Civic Standing, as interviewees described efforts to recognise local voices, engage with local opinions, and acknowledge the role of community representatives. Conversely, interviewees noted that the Our Heritage 2040 project was conducted by a consultancy firm based in London, and that the Leiston Film Festival featured films made by London professionals as well. One interviewee criticised this approach, arguing that there are qualified locals who are capable of completing such work. They emphasised that this would not only enhance community benefits but also recognise the talent and skills present within the local population. The reliance on London-based firms, thereby, appears to limit Civic Standing, as participants highlighted the limited involvement of local expertise and knowledge.

When asked whether individuals felt that their feedback and voices were respected and recognised by Sizewell C, the overall impression was that people did feel acknowledged by the project. When speaking to one interviewee about whether they felt their opinions and feedback were recognised and addressed, they said, "Yes and no, kind of. I mean, I feel like on an individual, person-to-person level, sure, but that's [feedback] still got to go through meetings and whatnot, and it won't survive that [....]". (I4)

Lastly, several interviewees noted that Sizewell C and Sizewell B are two of the area's largest employers, with many locals either working there themselves or having family or friends who work there. This makes voicing opinions about the companies a sensitive topic, with several interviewees reporting that they knew people who avoided saying they work there to prevent heated discussions. Moreover, some interviewees portrayed company employees as lacking independent opinions. A local resident illustrated this concern when stating:

> "... people that we've known for a long time, who have started work there…. over time, they lose their own opinion of it…. I've felt like, and you try to talk to them about it, and they sort of seem like they're still at work. And they're like going far out of their way to defend this billion, billion euro corporation." (I4).

Overall, the findings indicate the presence of Civic Standing within the project, particularly in relation to participants feeling listened to and having their opinions respected. The extent to which this translates into action and results in tangible effects on the project is explored in the following section, which examines the dimension of Influence.

### 5.2.3 Influence

The TOV's third dimension, Influence, indicates how people's voices are reflected in the decision-making process and in the influence they have. The following section of this chapter will identify factors that constitute, support, and hinder the dimension of Influence based on my interviews.

The Sizewell C employees I interviewed for this study asserted that residents can influence major decisions, though this was more likely during the formal consultation period. Despite this, residents who weren't affiliated with Sizewell C expressed a feeling of powerlessness in decision-making, even during the consultation period. Some described the major decisions as predetermined with little room for negotiation.

Despite the feeling of powerlessness, several interviewees noted that the project has incorporated local suggestions on a more minor, operational level, such as agreeing to put up deer signage along a heavily trafficked road and to place stickers on contracted Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) to indicate that they work for the project. Moreover, the construction culture that, according to several interviewees, brought drugs, crime and trouble to Leiston during the construction

of Sizewell B has been combated by implementing stricter regulations and precautionary measures, such as regular drug and alcohol tests.

The minor decisions influenced by residents are reportedly communicated to the public during various events, meetings, and forums. The target of responding to inquiries within 5 days means suggestions and feedback are read and followed up on promptly, even if they do not lead to tangible influence, according to interviewees. Moreover, interviewees imply that recurring comments and feedback can, over time, be acknowledged and monitored by Sizewell C, with the potential of being implemented in the future.

During a discussion with a member of the senior management team, it was noted that previous community feedback indicated that Sizewell A and Sizewell B did not generate enough employment opportunities for the local area. This subsequently led Sizewell C to commit to employing more locals throughout the project. Moreover, the person described a high level of dropouts from further education, leaving many 16+ year olds ineligible for jobs at Sizewell C purely because of a lack of education. To combat this, Sizewell C aims to improve education in the area by building a local college to increase the likelihood that locals are qualified for higher-paying jobs.

## 5.3 Cross-dimensional analysis

In the following section, I will build on the findings presented above and adopt a cross-dimensional perspective to explore how the TOV's three dimensions interact in shaping stakeholder experiences. While the preceding analysis considered each dimension individually, the data suggest that these dimensions are closely interconnected. By analysing them together, several key patterns and contradictions become visible.

A core pattern evident throughout my data is the extensive opportunities for participation in various engagement initiatives and the abundance of information on the Sizewell C project. The variety of communication channels facilitates participation by enabling information exchange and provides platforms for engagement where individuals can be heard and acknowledged. Despite this, there is a recurring sense of powerlessness as a community and a perception of a lack of influence, particularly over major project decisions.

When comparing different stakeholder perspectives, it becomes evident that there is a divide between Sizewell C employees and residents' experiences of participation. Sizewell C employees describe ample opportunities for

participation, including groups such as Friends of Sizewell C, meetings with Sizewell beach residents, informative events, and school visits, as well as events with Sizewell Collective, an initiative that aims to support the community through the arts. Residents not directly affiliated with Sizewell C repeatedly describe these as more exclusively targeted at Sizewell employees and poorly communicated, as exemplified by the majority of my interviewees' limited knowledge of Friends of Sizewell C.

My findings indicate that the interviewees who felt most influential and acknowledged were those with personal contacts within the project. Several participants mentioned that they didn't find it necessary to visit the information office to voice a concern, as they could simply email a known contact within the project to address it directly. When I asked one interviewee how they typically conveyed feedback, they shared: "I've sent emails mainly. Personally, I don't think I'd drive all the way down there [to Leiston] just to go into the office to talk to them." (I10).

In summary, the findings indicate that all three dimensions of the Trinity of Voice: Access, Civic Standing, and Influence, are present within the Sizewell C project through its various engagement initiatives and communication efforts. The project provides opportunities for participation, and the views expressed through these efforts are generally acknowledged and respected. However, the findings suggest that relatively few of these contributions translate into influence over major project decisions. As such, while all three dimensions are evident, they are present to differing degrees, with influence appearing less prominent than access and civic standing.

# 6. Discussion

This chapter will critically examine the findings outlined in Chapter 5, beginning with a response to the study's main research question. Moreover, the chapter will address the group Friends of Sizewell C and situate my findings within a broader academic context, thereby linking them to the conceptual framework established in Chapter 3.

## 6.1 Main research question

This study sought to answer the question: How do Sizewell C's communication and stakeholder engagement initiatives shape stakeholders' trust in the project? My findings indicate that engagement practices enhance trust in the project to a certain degree, as the wide variety of initiatives creates both informal and formal forums for meeting new people, learning about the project, and developing or practising skills. However, while Sizewell C provides extensive opportunities for participation and demonstrates recognition of stakeholder perspectives, stakeholders' limited influence over decision-making means these initiatives tend to support dialogue rather than foster deeper, more meaningful levels of trust in the project.

My findings suggest that Sizewell C's communication strategies play a crucial role in fostering stakeholder trust by ensuring access to information and acknowledging stakeholder perspectives. However, trust is compromised when communications come across as overly corporate, overwhelming, or lacking transparency for the target audience, i.e., local residents. Despite considerable effort and resources devoted to making communication as accessible as possible across numerous channels, these initiatives sometimes backfire, leading to information overload and diminishing their intended effect.

Lastly, it is essential to recognise that the question of trust in this project concerns the project itself rather than the broader acceptability of nuclear energy. While there is considerable criticism and scepticism surrounding the project, which inevitably affects trust and acceptability, this largely stems from the unexpected disruptions it has caused. Ultimately, this can be traced back to a failure to communicate the extent of what to expect during construction in a way that the general public can understand. As a result, many appear to feel deceived by the project.

## 6.2 Acceptability

As the findings illustrate, all three dimensions of the Trinity of Voice are present in the Sizewell C project, though to varying degrees. Residents believe they have no influence over major project decisions, which they experience as predetermined. The presence of Influence can therefore be interpreted as largely symbolic. This is not particularly surprising, as Senecah (2024) contends that Influence is challenging to achieve in practice. A lack of Influence risks undermining the legitimacy of the process (Senecah 2024), indicating that, regardless of how strong the other two dimensions are, a lower degree of Influence will diminish overall trust and potentially public acceptability of the project.

My findings align with those of Liu et al. (2019) in their study on solar energy projects in the Netherlands and China. Similar to the cases examined in that study, Leiston has prior experience with large-scale energy developments. This is significant, as previous exposure can shape how stakeholders interpret current communication and participatory processes, influencing their expectations, levels of trust, and overall understanding of the project (Liu et al., 2019).

Liu et al. (2019) demonstrate that when stakeholder influence is limited to minor decisions, it can negatively affect overall project acceptability. In the context of Sizewell C, this suggests that existing levels of public acceptability could be further strengthened by enabling residents to have more meaningful influence over decision-making processes that extend beyond deer signage and stickers on HGVs. Additionally, increasing residents' influence could have a ripple effect on other dimensions of the TOV, such as boosting residents' sense of voice (Civic Standing) and increasing their motivation to engage (Access).

Similar to the Dutch case in Liu et al.'s (2019) study, Leiston has prior experience with the specific type of energy initiative being developed nearby. In the Dutch case, trust in the responsible actor significantly influenced the acceptability of the energy initiative, more so than the impact on major project decisions did (Liu et al. 2019). This suggests that enhancing trust in Sizewell C could result in similar benefits. Although public input on major project decisions was less effective at increasing acceptability in the Netherlands (Liu et al. 2019), the ability to influence remains vital for building trust and should therefore not either be overlooked (Senecah 2024). While Liu et al.'s (2019) study found that having both trust and major influence in a project did not necessarily produce increased acceptability in the Dutch context compared to having only one, I think that strengthening both elements could reinforce a project's resilience. In comparison to the Dutch case, this could be considered especially relevant, given that trust in

Sizewell C may be more vulnerable to shifts in overall trust in government and political changes, as the government is the company's biggest stakeholder.

## 6.3 Power Relationships

When analysing the findings through the lens of the Trinity of Voice, it is crucial to take into account the power relationships present within the project. Potential imbalances can significantly influence local perceptions and, in turn, affect the three dimensions of the framework, thereby impacting overall trust. As highlighted in Chapter 5, Sizewell C and Sizewell B are among the area's largest employers, which gives them significant power and authority. This dynamic risks undermining the dimensions of the Trinity of Voice, as it could affect participation in events and discourage individuals from freely and honestly expressing themselves, ultimately reducing their influence on the project.

The findings showed that discussing the Sizewell nuclear power stations could be a delicate topic in Leiston, where many residents are employed by the stations or have family and friends in the nuclear sector. Such a situation could explain why some company employees are perceived to lack independent opinions. As mentioned in section 5.2.2, a local resident expressed concern, noting that people they know who have begun working on the project tend to gradually lose their own opinions and become strong advocates for it.

This concern could reflect power imbalances arising from individuals' dependence on their income and future employment prospects, creating the perception that one must be supportive rather than critical to secure a position within the project, which risks silencing "voice" and undermining trust. These potential power imbalances can be further understood through the Swedish concept of Bruksanda. Despite being a contemporary setting, the town of Leiston can be likened to a modern-day version of a traditional Swedish mill town. In this context, traditional work attire, such as leather aprons and caps, have been replaced by high-visibility jackets and hard hats, yet similar underlying social dynamics remain.

The values and norms that emerge in such communities, where a single local employer plays a dominant role, tend to shape particular perspectives and ways of thinking (Forsberg et al., 2001). Steg et al. (2015) argue that values play a key role in shaping both the public acceptability of energy policies and trust in the actors involved. Leiston has strong engineering and industrial roots, having played a significant role in Suffolk's industrial revolution (Leiston Town Council, n.d.). Industry can therefore be seen as deeply embedded in the town's identity,

and it is likely that elements of Bruksanda were already present long before the construction of the nuclear power stations.

My findings indicate a degree of dependence on the Sizewell nuclear power stations, as they provide important opportunities for youth and employment in an area with few other employment options. This dependency, together with the normalisation of the nuclear industry's presence, may contribute to the emergence or persistence of a Bruksanda, which normalises certain perspectives and values regarding nuclear power stations and, subsequently, the Sizewell C project. Such a context can, intentionally or unintentionally, discourage or limit the expression of opinions that challenge or critique nuclear energy.

Lastly, the potential presence of Bruksanda in Leiston could foster forms of blind trust in the technology, leading the community to accept the proposed new reactor without scrutiny. This can also extend to Sizewell C as a whole, where individuals might place faith in the company without critically questioning its trustworthiness. Should expectations fall short, this blind trust could result in disappointment, potentially straining the relationship between local stakeholders and Sizewell C, thus eroding confidence and trust over time. This raises the question of what kind of trust should be sought after and fostered within such a project. Adopting a more agonistic perspective on dialogue could, for example, help ensure that responsible actors are held accountable, fostering a sense of ownership and agency among locals.

## 6.4 Friends of Sizewell C

The thesis sought to examine local perceptions of the group Friends of Sizewell C and the participation opportunities it offers. Initially intended as the main focus of the study, the group describes itself as an exclusive network providing unique access to events and meetings with the Sizewell C project team, claiming to represent the local community's views. This positioning made it a particularly relevant case for analysing participatory processes.

However, as noted in Chapter 5, none of the interviewees were members of the group, despite efforts to recruit local participants. Most had only heard of it and were unable to provide further details, with the majority unaware of any personal connections to members. This limited visibility is surprising given the group's claim of over 1,000 members in a sparsely populated area, which suggests that the group may function more passively than implied, raising questions about its reach and perceived legitimacy.

According to a senior member of the Sizewell C management team, the group was originally established as a communication tool to share project information and facilitate dialogue with the local community. Meetings are held quarterly in an informal setting, primarily attended by current or former employees of Sizewell A and B, who are encouraged to bring others along. However, the Sizewell B employees interviewed in this study were not members and expressed no need to engage, saying they already supported the project. This further brings into question the group's role and necessity as a participatory forum.

In theory, the group has the potential to foster trust by creating spaces for shared experiences and interaction, thereby building meaningful relationships (Vaske et al., 2007). In practice, however, its limited visibility and apparent lack of active engagement make it difficult to assess whether this potential is realised. Rather than strengthening trust, the group's low profile may risk undermining it. Additionally, its glossy, professional website may create expectations about its size and influence that do not align with local perceptions, potentially contributing to a sense of inauthenticity and raising doubts about the credibility of other engagement initiatives associated with Sizewell C.

## 6.5 Broader Implications

The Sizewell C project represents a new generation of nuclear energy development in the Global North, emerging in a context shaped by geopolitical uncertainty and green energy enthusiasm. The case can be understood through the lens of a "sacrifice zone" (Scott & Smith, 2017), whereby certain communities bear the costs of large-scale energy projects, such as disruption, environmental change, and perceived safety risks, for the benefit of a wider population. Although the Sizewell C site itself is not directly inhabited, its close proximity to residential areas, including Sizewell Beach and Leiston, makes these impacts locally tangible. Its classification as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, expected to supply energy to over six million households across the UK, reinforces the suggestion of it being a sacrifice zone by emphasising its contribution to a perceived "greater good.". This dynamic may help explain the sense of powerlessness expressed by some community members and the perception that the project's communication efforts are artificial and designed to make the project look good nationally rather than consider local concerns and demands.

Leiston and the surrounding area's potential function as a sacrifice zone is further supported by comments made by a Sizewell B employee, who, similar to the other Sizewell B employee interviewed, expressed no perceived need to attend

informational events, as they already supported the project and understood its significance. This reflects an acceptance of a “greater good” narrative, despite the disruption and environmental impacts associated with the project. Additionally, it could imply that the “greater good” narrative overrides local concerns and is perceived as more important to uphold than local acceptance and support.

The case of Sizewell C also reflects a broader trend in nuclear development, whereby new facilities are often located on or near existing sites (Bull 2023). This creates a particularly complex context for trust-building, as the local community is both familiar with and financially dependent on the nuclear industry, given its history of providing local employment and its contribution to the community’s Bruksanda. As a result, residents may express support for the project while simultaneously feeling misled and concerned about the extent of disruption and environmental impacts. This raises the question of whether Bruksanda and the normalisation of nuclear energy may contribute to reduced local perceptions of the area as a sacrifice zone, as the industry is closely embedded in local identity and experience.

Looking ahead, the continued expansion of nuclear energy will require development in locations without this historical legacy or Bruksanda. This suggests that the Sizewell C case may not be directly applicable in contexts lacking prior experience with nuclear projects, given the importance of familiarity in fostering trust and public acceptability (Liu et al., 2019; Ryu et al., 2018). However, such cases may still offer valuable insights. In particular, they can function as testing grounds for engagement strategies and participatory processes within relatively experienced and, to some extent, more accepting and trusting communities. Lessons learned from these cases could support adaptations needed to ensure more effective engagement in contexts with no prior experience.

Overall, the findings suggest that the communication and engagement efforts associated with Sizewell C reflect an awareness of the importance of trust and public acceptability in project delivery. This is particularly significant considering the contested history and political sensitivities surrounding nuclear energy. However, these efforts are recurringly perceived as overwhelming and artificial, indicating a need for more targeted and context-sensitive approaches. While the project’s approach aligns in principle with the broader goals of inclusive participation and responsive, representative decision-making, such as those outlined in the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal 16, in practice, the limited influence given to local stakeholders undermines these ambitions. At the same time, the project’s emphasis on local employment and education contributes positively to rural development, which is especially relevant in the context of

declining youth populations across the Global North (Eurostat, 2023). If communication and engagement efforts are paired with greater opportunities for meaningful influence, Sizewell C has the potential to serve as a valuable model for future nuclear energy projects in the UK and beyond.

# 7. Conclusion

In a context where the UK, like much of the Global North, aims to expand its nuclear energy infrastructure to achieve a domestic, low-carbon energy system, the Sizewell C project offers valuable insights into a new generation of large-scale nuclear energy developments. As collaborative approaches become increasingly central to environmental planning and management, their effectiveness depends heavily on fostering trust among stakeholders (Senecah, 2024). Moreover, trust is widely recognised as a key factor in shaping public acceptability of nuclear energy (Ryu et al., 2018). This thesis, therefore, set out to examine how Sizewell C's communication and stakeholder engagement initiatives influence trust in the project, using Susan Senecah's Trinity of Voice as an analytical framework.

The findings of this thesis suggest that the three dimensions of the Trinity of Voice: Access, Civic Standing, and Influence, are present to varying degrees, contributing to a certain level of trust in the project. However, the relatively limited degree of Influence appears to undermine this trust, contributing to perceptions of powerlessness and a sense that major decisions are predetermined. This supports Senecah's (2024) argument that Influence is often the most difficult dimension to realise in practice.

While Sizewell C employs extensive communication efforts to engage stakeholders, these are at times perceived as overwhelming and artificial. This may weaken perceived legitimacy and, in turn, diminish trust. These findings suggest that more targeted, context-sensitive communication strategies may be more effective at aligning with local needs and expectations.

Notably, stakeholder criticism is directed less towards nuclear energy as a technology and more towards Sizewell C as an actor. This may be explained by Leiston's long-standing relationship with the nuclear energy industry, where norms and values shaped by the community's Bruksanda influence levels of acceptability and trust. This also raises the question of what kind of trust projects in such contexts should seek to achieve. If the aim is to develop nuclear energy successfully while committing to continuous improvement, it may be worthwhile to adopt a more agonistic perspective on dialogue, particularly in the early stages when the sector is trying to re-establish itself.

Examining the Sizewell C case through the lens of Sacrifice zones offers a further explanation as to why disruption emerges as a central critique of the project. A substantial number of the interviewed residents described local communities as being heavily burdened by environmental change, road works and the loss of land

designated as being of outstanding natural beauty as a result of the project. This, in combination with Sizewell C's expected role as the area's largest employer, creates a complex dynamic in which the community may feel both dependent on and disadvantaged by the project.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that the interviews with 11 stakeholders conducted for this thesis are not representative of the wider community. Future research could build on these findings by expanding the sample size and making renewed efforts to engage supporter groups such as Friends of Sizewell C, with *the aim of investigating how such groups create opportunities for "voice" and* how the Trinity of Voice (TOV) surfaces within them. It would be especially interesting to examine whether such groups organise their views collectively and, if so, whether they have a more tangible influence on major project decisions when approaching the project as a unified group rather than as individuals. Future research could also investigate how the dimensions of the TOV manifest in culturally similar contexts where nuclear energy is introduced *without* a prior history of such developments. Such studies could help determine whether insights from cases such as Sizewell C are transferable to other contexts or largely shaped by local conditions. In doing so, they could contribute to a deeper understanding of how Bruksanda and familiarity with technology influence trust and the acceptability of large-scale energy projects.

The TOV was used in this thesis because it explicitly conceptualises the role of trust in collaborative processes, making it particularly relevant to Sizewell C's various efforts to involve the local community. In addition, I believe the framework is well suited to this case given existing research highlighting the close relationship between trust and the acceptability of nuclear energy. Nevertheless, the case could also be analysed through alternative theoretical lenses and conceptual frameworks. For example, future research could examine how social networks and emotional attachments shape trust, acceptance, and local actors' perceived ability and willingness to influence the project. Moreover, future research could further examine Sizewell C's communication strategies through a comparative discourse analysis of its framing in national and local media. Such an approach would enable a critical exploration of how large-scale infrastructure projects are discursively constructed and legitimised. This could also highlight tensions between competing discourses and how (or whether) local needs and concerns are acknowledged or marginalised within dominant narratives of development and energy transitions.

# 8. AI Disclosure

In accordance with the AI guidelines established by the Environmental Communication and Management program at SLU, this thesis used Grammarly to enhance sentence structure and grammar. Grammarly provided a variety of suggestions, including synonyms, spelling corrections, and rephrasing alternatives. Although I am bilingual and consider myself a competent English speaker and writer, the tool enhanced my spelling, improved the clarity of my text, and provided more academic synonyms for informal words. While I incorporated some of these suggestions into my thesis, I opted to disregard others that I found unsuitable or excessively academic, as they made the text nearly incomprehensible.

I also used the AI-powered research assistant NotebookLM to deepen my understanding of relevant literature. The tool created podcasts, simplified and summarised complex information, thereby developing my comprehension of the material and enriching my research process. However, I am aware of the risk this poses in potentially limiting my own understanding of the text. To mitigate this, I ensured that I read the content I requested for summarisation beforehand. Additionally, I asked for specific page numbers, allowing me to verify that the summaries provided were accurate and true to the original material.

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# 10. Popular science summary

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# BETWEEN DIALOGUE & DECISION-MAKING

## Communication and Stakeholder Trust in the Sizewell C Project

### CONCLUSION

This study explores trust in nuclear energy development, using Sizewell C as an example. The results suggest that while the Sizewell C project has made efforts to involve the local community, there is still room for improvement. More meaningful engagement, clearer communication, and greater local influence over decision-making could help increase trust and acceptance of large-scale energy infrastructure.

### BACKGROUND

40 years after the Chernobyl accident, many countries in the Global North are strengthening their domestic energy security through renewed investment in nuclear power, and the UK is no exception. Sizewell C is a new nuclear power station being built alongside two existing power stations on England's east coast.

Trust is a central factor in increasing public support and acceptance of nuclear energy. The Sizewell C project includes extensive communication and community engagement efforts aimed at benefiting the local area. However, it remains unclear how such initiatives shape trust, particularly in a community with prior experience of nuclear infrastructure.

Sizewell A & B

**Access**
(Information & Participation)

**Civic Standing**
(Respect & Recognition)

**Influence**
(Impact on outcome)

The TOV's 3 dimensions for building trust (Senecah 2024)

### RESULTS

For many residents, the issue of trust is not rooted in the nuclear technology itself. Instead, concerns relate more strongly to the perceived trustworthiness of the actor responsible for the project.

Key findings:

- Communication and engagement efforts have helped build some level of trust.
- Limited local influence, as well as overwhelming and inauthentic communication, can undermine trust.
- The findings highlight the need for genuine participation, clearer communication, and stronger local influence in decision-making.

Let's connect!

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