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*The wind power debate in
the UK: arguments,
strategies and the
challenge of dealing with
local opposition*

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Rapport



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Foreword

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1 Introduction

While the UK Government is strongly committed to tough goals on renewable energy, subsequent protests from local communities and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) persist, posing a severe threat to the fulfilment of these goals (Strachan and Lal 2004; Bell et al. 2005; SDC 2005; Toke 2005a; Toke 2005c; Strachan et al. 2006;). Despite a political and social climate characterized by a strong concern for climate change and support for renewable energy in *general*, this has not correlated with local acceptance for *specific* renewable energy schemes, seen clearly in the case of onshore wind power (Bell et al. 2005; Toke 2005a). Although the UK recently reached the milestone of 2 gigawatts (GW) installed wind power capacity, 8 GW of potential wind power remains held up in the planning system (BWEA 2007). Local opposition is a clear social barrier at the level of implementation in the UK, with various NGOs and local groups contributing to the debate. This study aims to understand the arguments, strategies and attitudes promoted in the wind power debate, and to explore the conditions that hinder or enhance local acceptance for wind power.

The first aim of the paper is to explore the role NGOs and social networks play in organizing local opposition/support to wind power. NGOs here refer to: international NGOs such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and WWF; landscape protection groups as CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England); conservation groups as RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds); anti-wind groups as Views of Scotland and Country Guardian; and local opposition groups established to oppose specific wind power schemes. Within the NGO movement there is evidence of highly polarized groups, promoting opposing discourses with conflicting values and differing versions of the “truth” about wind power (Szarka 2004). This is brought into local debate and decision-making through an array of strategies.

The deeper reasons for opposition, however, relate to systemic factors which will be explored as a second aim of the paper. Here, current research efforts on local opposition will be synthesized, so as to “take stock” of common perceptions of plausible causes and solutions to the problem. A common denominator for the research is to move away from NIMBY- explanations (“Not in my backyard”) that equate opposition with selfish motives, towards a broader focus on the social systems and institutions that create protest (see Burningham 2000). In this paper academic explanations are categorized into three. Firstly, the role of institutions centres on the structural frames that cause protest, where the top-down approach of the government, and the limitations of the overarching energy policy and the planning system are central. Secondly, the role of popular opinion focuses on

individual motivations for opposition, where estrangement and lack of trust are viewed as key. Finally, the role of organized groups explains how NGOs take a role in organizing local opposition and support for wind power.

While onshore wind power in the UK remains the case of the study, the conclusions reached should also be of interest in a broader context. The UK provides a powerful example of the role local opposition may have, and it also sheds light on some very real and difficult issues that must be dealt with if wind power is to be a viable strategy in dealing with issues of climate change.

2 Wind power and renewable energy in the UK

The focus on renewable energy in the UK is strongly related to a concern for climate change, supplemented by concerns for future energy supply. Issues of climate change and renewable energy have taken a central role on political, business and social agendas, escalating over the past years.

2.1 National targets, policies and policy instruments

Under the Kyoto protocol, and the EU burden sharing agreement, the UK is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with 12, 5% compared to 1990 levels, between 2008 and 2012. In addition, goals of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2050 have been set forth (DTI 2003). Increasing the amount of renewable energy in electricity consumption is a key part of the strategy to combat climate change and secure supply (DTI 2003; DTI 2006; DTI 2007). The specific target is that 10% of total electricity supply is to come from renewable sources by 2010.¹ This is supplemented by an “aspiration” to double this amount by 2020 (DTI 2003).

There is a desire by the UK Government and the Scottish Executive to expand the number of wind farms in order to meet the renewable energy goals (Strachan and Lal 2004:553). The British Isles have some of the best wind resources in Europe, and theoretically, wind power is capable of providing 100% of the country’s electricity demand (IEA 2002). Subsequently it is technologically mature and with lower costs than other renewable energy options.

The UK-wide targets are supplemented by a number of policy instruments aimed at reducing carbon emissions in general, and fostering renewable energy schemes in particular. These are largely coloured by a commitment to market-based instruments and competition (see IEA 2002).

The Renewable Obligation (RO) is the central support mechanism for the expansion of renewable electricity and thus wind power (DTI 2006:16). It requires energy suppliers to deliver a specific amount of their supplied electricity from renewable sources. The RO takes form of a market based system, involving elements of competition to bring prices down (Toke et al. 2008). It creates a framework where renewable energy, which is more expensive to produce than oil and gas, can become competitive with them (DTI 2006:16). In addition to the RO, the UK Government is donating significant sums to various renewables support-programmes (DTI 2006).

¹ This is consistent with obligations under the EU RES-E Directive.

In May 2007, a new Energy White Paper was presented to provide longer term clarity on the Government's future policy directions on renewables (DTI 2007). While showing continued commitment to renewables, the prior "aspiration" to reach a 20% target of electricity from renewables within 2020, is not expressed as a firm target.

2.2 From policy to practice: implementing wind power schemes

Although the main policy instrument to foster renewable energy is directed towards business (the RO), all developers must obtain planning consent. For wind power schemes, as with any renewable energy project, planning consent is the key permit required to proceed (BWEA 2003). Under the current system, the majority of applications in Great Britain are dealt with by local planning authorities, making it a local political decision.

As part of the application process, developers must prepare an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), which investigates concerns related to landscape, noise and other environmental effects. The results are published in an Environmental Statement which is public and designed to be used in the consent process (SDC 2005). Developers must consult a range of interested parties through a planning consultation. Interested parties may in this context be relevant parish councils, interested professionals and recreational groups (Haggett and Toke 2006). In addition, members of the public and organisations can make representations (Toke 2005a).

Based on the EIA, responses to the planning consultation, consideration of regional, local and national planning policies, the local planning authority makes a recommendation to the development and control (planning) committee (SDC 2005; Toke 2005a; Haggett and Toke 2006). This body makes the final decision on the application. If the application is rejected, the developer can take the case to the relevant appeal body which can overrule the original decision (SDC 2005).

Applications for larger projects go straight to central government. However, all arguments for and against a proposed development still have to be considered (SDC 2005).

There are specific policy guidelines in place to guide decision-making bodies and create consistency in planning application responses. Although these differ between the national governments, the core message is that local governments should follow a "presumption in favour of wind power".

2.2.1 Planning consent and refusal

In February 2007 the UK reached a milestone, achieving 2 gigawatts of installed wind power capacity through 137 wind farms spread across the country. This means the UK is number 8 in the world in terms of installed capacity. The UK has thus doubled electricity generation from wind in a little over a year, with wind power now accounting for 1.5% of total UK electricity supplies (BWEA 2007).

Although these numbers are clearly positive, refusals and slow decision-making processes are currently posing severe threats to the fulfilment of the 2010 targets of 10% electricity from renewable sources. Currently a potential of over 8 GW from onshore wind projects are held up in the planning system. In the four months following the publication of the Stern review, 12 out of 18 decisions for onshore wind power schemes were refused, giving an approval rate of only 33% (BWEA 2007). Statistics from 1999 to 2004 show that when accounting for rejections that go to appeal, the approval rate increases to around 75% (Toke 2005b). The BWEA (British Wind Energy Association) (2007:3) reports that in 2006 it took local councils an average of 16 months to rule on wind farm applications compared with the statutory time period for decisions of 16 weeks. The Government on their side, report that new speed targets for handling local planning applications in general, set to be reached by March 2007, have largely been met (CLG et al. 2007:7).

As the statistics show, gaining planning consent in the UK has proven a difficult matter, and it is widely accepted that local opposition channelled through the planning system contributes strongly to this (Strachan and Lal 2004; Toke 2005a; Haggett and Toke 2006; Strachan et al. 2006). This opposition is primarily shown to be a problem in the planning phase and diminishes as projects are constructed (Warren et al. 2005). It is subsequently taking place against a societal framework where a strong majority is believed to be in favour of wind power, pointing to a discrepancy or “social gap” (see Bell et al. 2005).



3 Conflicts over wind power: the pro- and anti-wind lobbies

The interplay between organized local interests and local planning institutions is said to determine the fate of specific wind power schemes (Toke et al. 2008:7-8). This makes it highly relevant to focus on the social setting within which local opposition is taking form, and on the organizations taking part in the debate. The ongoing controversies are dominated by two strongly polarized groups: an anti-wind lobby and a pro-wind lobby. While the pro-wind lobby stresses the role of renewable energy in battling climate change, the anti-wind lobby claims this idea is faulty, and that damaging other aspects of nature cannot be justified. In between these two groups, is a “qualified-yes group”, consisting of NGOs showing reservations against wind power, while subsequently seeing the urgency of dealing with climate change.²

3.1 *The pro-wind lobby*

The pro-wind coalition is characterized by a common concern for climate change, and a belief that promoting wind power must be prioritized for the good of the planet. The coalition includes international environmental NGOs, national NGOs, a few local pro-wind NGOs, energy agencies, business and government, all working in different ways.

The NGOs are mostly concerned with influencing public opinion (Szarka 2004). Many of the large international NGOs such as Greenpeace, WWF and Friends of the Earth, are now taking a positive stance when it comes to wind power development, and taking concrete measures to drive public mobilization. Recognizing that a major hindrance to further development in the UK is local opposition, the three NGOs have launched a mutual campaign, represented by the website: “Yes2Wind: For a Clean Energy Future”.³ This site is aimed specifically at providing information and mobilizing people to locally voice their pro-wind attitudes in the planning process. They argue that if people who are positive to wind power would be equally loud in voicing support for wind power schemes, as opponents are in voicing negative views, more schemes would come into place.

The pro-wind lobby uses considerable effort to justify the development of wind power as a legitimate strategy in battling climate change. Substantial work is dedicated to

² The distinctions made between the pro and anti wind lobbies, and the qualified yes group, is largely based on Szarka (2004).

³ See: www.yes2wind.com.

responding and debunking “myths” about wind power. With reference to opinion polls and other research, they counteract the very claims the anti-wind lobby are holding against wind power. This involves stating that modern turbines are not a significant source of noise; threat to birds and nature is avoided due to the mandatory environmental impact assessment; wind power does not necessarily affect tourism etc. (Yes2Wind 2007a).

The UK pro-wind lobby defends their position with arguments built largely on “economic and scientific rationalities” (see Szarka 2004). Wind power is seen as necessary because of scientifically proven climate change, and is furthermore the economically most viable solution. They emphasize that wind power does not need to come at the expense of other environmental concerns. This also appeals to an ethical normative frame where wind power is treated as morally altruistic and “the right thing to do”. This has led to counter arguments where the pro-wind lobby has been accused of making simplistic moral points, seeing resistance as a case of reprehensible and selfish NIMBYism (ibid).

3.2 The anti-wind lobby

Several NGOs have been established with the purpose of actively opposing wind farm development, making up the anti-wind lobby. These can be divided into national umbrella organizations, which represent a number of smaller anti-wind farm groups and put forth generic arguments related to energy policy; and local anti-wind-power groups, often established in response to one particular development.

3.2.1 Umbrella groups

The Country Guardian⁴ is the umbrella group for anti-wind farm groups in England and Wales, while Views of Scotland⁵ has the same function in Scotland. They work actively to hinder wind power schemes from coming into place by gathering and disseminating information to local groups, doing PR work etc.

The arguments of these groups centre on the technology, claiming it is flawed and ineffective, and thus unable to deliver policy targets promised by the Government. In contrast to the claims of the pro-wind lobby, they see wind power as posing “long term threat” and “irreversible damage” to the countryside, wilderness areas and ecosystems. Additional arguments are threats to tourism, noise, visual effects etc. Wind power, in their view, is not worth the impact it has on wildlife and people’s lives. The organizations are clearly conservationist, and see unspoiled nature and wilderness as an invaluable national asset under threat from wind power.

It is not primarily difference of opinion on climate change that sets the anti-wind lobby apart from the pro-wind lobby, but differences with respect to wind energy as a solution (Szarka 2004). Suggestions are made that in fighting climate change, Government

⁴ See: <http://www.countryguardian.net/cg.htm>.

⁵ See: <http://www.viewsofscotland.org/>.

should rather target aspects such as traffic growth, energy consumption, energy efficiency etc.

A common ploy for the arguments posed, is to divert attention from the claim that opposition to wind power is selfish “NIMBYism”. Instead anti-wind arguments are universalized to socially held opinions, relevant beyond specific cases (Bell et al. 2005; Haggett and Toke 2006). Like the pro-wind lobby, the anti-wind lobby makes references to science, though not to the mainstream IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) line. Their arguments also bear elements of moralistic charges towards the opposing groups

3.2.2 Local opposition groups

There are also a number of local action groups whose goals are to mobilize the public against wind projects in their area.

Arguments proposed by local action groups vary, but seem largely consistent with those outlined for the umbrella organizations. In addition, the local action groups heavily emphasize the uniqueness of the particular areas they are defending. Landscape value is given a central position, but the value is sought universalized beyond the immediate community. The impression is given that it is in the interest of the nation, not only the locals, to protect these “unique” areas (Haggett and Toke 2006).

The groups work to mobilize the public by holding meetings where the specific project, and wind power as a technology, is discussed. It is hard to capture the nature of these meetings across the board. There are, however, suggestions that the anti-wind lobby arguments dominate in these forums, and may not always be countered by arguments from the opposing side. A recent article from the local newspaper of Mendip and South Somerset, “FosseWay”, describes such a meeting in a newly established action group. Arguments of inefficiency, health dangers and noise are put forth, many of which the pro-wind lobby would term out of date or faulty (FosseWay 2007).

3.3 The qualified-yes group

In addition to the pro- and anti-wind lobby there are now a number of traditional conservation organizations engaging in wind power and adopting a “qualified-yes” position. They see climate change as a major threat to biodiversity and wildlife, and they believe wind power has the power to alleviate this, hence supporting governmental goals and policies. They also emphasize, however, that wind power schemes can, and must, meet conservation and wildlife needs. This is true for both the Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB)⁶ and the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE).⁷

⁶ See: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/windfarms/index.asp>.

⁷ See: <http://www.cpre.org.uk/campaigns/natural-resources/climate-change-and-energy/wind-farms-alone-will-not-solve-our-problems>.

Whereas the RSPB is committed to protecting the environment for birds and wildlife, the CPRE places humans and their right to a “tranquil, beautiful and diverse countryside” in the centre. The RSPB believes that there is sufficient knowledge to prevent wind turbines from harming birds through careful planning. They see it therefore, as essential that rigorous environmental assessments are carried out. Where inadequate environmental assessments are conducted, or if inadequate protection measures are taken, the RSPB will oppose development. The RSPB has also increasingly been approached by wind farm developers asking about suitable areas for development. They see this as positive as it gives them the chance to steer developers away from risky areas, and adjust plans early in the process.

The CPRE are more reluctant to offer support. They see the “intermittency and major visual impact [as limiting] the potential contribution of onshore turbines”. CPRE will as such only support schemes that do not damage the “beauty, character and tranquillity of rural England”. According to Toke (2006), CPRE has objected to around 40% of proposed cases. They are not against development as a matter of policy and assess each case on its own merits

Both NGOs strongly emphasize that the Government cannot only rely on wind power to battle climate change. While the RSPB emphasizes that a mix of renewable energy technologies must be used, CPRE believes that reducing energy consumption must be at the core. Both acknowledge that in the current situation wind power has a role to play, but that balance needs to be struck between immediate damage and long-term sustainability matters (see Szarka 2004).

3.4 Forming local opinion

Within this social framework, where NGOs are loudly voicing opinions of opposing character, local residents must shape their opinions. It is beyond the scope of the paper to assess the form of influence these groups actually have on local opinion. It is nonetheless important not to automatically equate local opinion with any of the specific groups or lobbies. It is also important to note that the mere existence of negative attitudes does not automatically prevent wind power schemes. Stopping a new project is largely determined by the interplay between negative attitudes, well organized opposition groups, and the local planning authority. While NGOs may be helpful in organizing public opposition, the deeper reasons for opposition also relate to systemic factors which will be discussed next.

4 Explaining local opposition to wind power; institutional, popular and group arguments

By synthesizing recent research efforts, different plausible causes and solutions concerning local opposition in the UK, will be discussed.⁸ Attempts to understand opposition is given in terms of institutional explanations: focusing on decision-making structures, planning systems etc.; popular explanations, where efforts are made to understand mechanisms behind individual responses; and group explanations, where the role of NGOs are discussed.

4.1 The role of institutions

Academics are increasingly seeing acceptance for wind power as formed in response to institutional factors (Breukers and Wolsink 2007, Wolsink 2007, Wüstenhagen et al. 2007, Toke et al. 2008). In this respect the UK Government's approach to renewable energy has been criticized as being too top-down- and business oriented and without sufficient involvement of local communities (Strachan and Lal 2004; Toke and Strachan 2006; Toke et al. 2008). These explanations on why opposition occurs in the first place are supplemented/ contrasted with explanations on why opposition becomes powerful. Here it is suggested that one problem may be faulty institutions that allow for opposition to dominate in decision-making, despite not representing the view of the majority (Bell et al. 2005).

The UK policy on renewables largely gives business the advantage in wind power schemes, while locals are expected to pay the price. The Government has focused on creating an economically competitive system through the RO (Renewable Obligation), where wind power is incorporated into existing industrial structures (Toke and Strachan 2006). This has led to a small number of large electricity suppliers and individual companies strongly dominating the UK wind energy market (Strachan et al. 2006). While the RO can support local ownership schemes in theory, too little is done to promote this option (Toke 2005c). Wind power therefore remains in the hands of large commercial organizations that are counted on to take the lead role in initiating change towards more sustainable energy production (Strachan et al. 2006).

⁸ The research reviewed in this section, to some extent deals with different parts of the UK. This is not seen as problematical as the goal is to shed light on some overriding perceptions of the problem, and because the governance structures are similar in the different regions. Some reference is also made to academics from other countries, pointing to more general trends.

Subsequent to investors and developers entering communities as outsiders, little is required of them in terms of involving local communities. The planning system requires formal consultation, where locals may have a say, but this is after a site has been picked, and the foundations for the projects are laid (SDC 2005). The dominant trend by developers has been not to involve locals in the early planning process, giving them little chance to voice their concerns, and influencing aspects of the development in starting phases.

On these grounds the UK planning system is strongly criticized for failing to sufficiently bridge the “dilemma between the promotion of wind power by national government, and the organization of regional/ local planning systems that regulates the siting of turbines *and* allows for citizen participation” (Strachan et al. 2006:11). With strong concerns for landscape in the UK public (Toke et al. 2008), siting decisions made without community involvement seems particularly problematical. This is strengthened by the rapid penetration of wind power the UK has seen since 2000 (*ibid.*). This development has not been supplemented by governmental initiatives on awareness raising concerning the benefit of wind power (Strachan and Lal 2004). The vast expansion of wind power also points to criticisms made towards the overarching energy policy for relying too heavily on onshore wind power and not supplementing this strategy with stronger initiatives on other renewables, energy efficiency and consumption (Strachan and Lal 2004; Toke and Strachan 2006).

Academics seem confident that local opposition to wind power can be countered by amending the organization of wind power. Local involvement in the general planning system and in relation to specific projects, in addition to local ownership, are seen as the key (Strachan and Lal 2004; Toke and Strachan 2006; Toke et al. 2008).

In this respect suggestions are made that the “planning system should...be revised to incorporate appropriate regional and local plans for wind power developments, with these being coordinated at a national level” (Strachan and Lal 2004:567). It is also suggested that the decision-making processes should be revised to become more participatory and include key stakeholders (Bell et al. 2005; Strachan et al. 2006:11; Toke and Strachan 2006). Subsequently strengthening communication processes, could give the developer a chance to discuss plans in an early phase and defend unfounded concern and avoid potential conflict (Strachan et al. 2006). However, it might also mean altering aspects of the planned projects in response to community concern (Bell 2005). With reference to the strong polarization of interest identified in the previous section, such a forum would provide an open stage where attempts could be made to address and unify the opposing discourses contributing to the debate.

In addition to stronger participation in the planning system, another solution proposed, is for Government to encourage greater *economic* involvement of the local community through variations of local ownership. This would ensure aspects of “fairness”,

as economic benefit is not then reserved for giant corporations, but to a larger extent the community. The RO in theory allows for local ownership, but only few examples exist in the UK. Many academics see the lack of local ownership as a fundamental challenge to successful implementation of wind power in the UK (Strachan et al. 2006; Toke et al. 2008).

On a different note, Bell et al. (2005) introduce an alternative structural criticism of the planning system. They suggest the planning system may have an inherent “democratic deficit”, where it is designed to accommodate the minority who oppose wind power rather than the majority who support it. This view doesn’t explain why opposition occurs in the first place, but why it is so powerful. It is based on the observation that the majority of the public is in favour of wind power, as shown in opinion polls, while a minority of locals control the decisions. Nevertheless, underlying several of the arguments presented in this paper, seems to be a notion that *general* support for wind power and support for *specific* schemes are two fundamentally different things that are not necessarily comparable (Wolsink 2007; Toke et al. 2008).

However, if a democratic deficit is the main problem, achieving “correct” representation is key (Bell et al. 2005). This will imply amending the planning system to accommodate positive views to a larger extent. In this context Bell et al. (2005) suggest basing decisions on direct public votes, independent opinion surveys etc. However, they also point out the difficulty of choosing the relevant demos in such a system. The authors also question whether the views of people will be accurately captured through such amendments. Another alternative is to change “the underlying character of the planning process from confrontation to collaboration” (Bell et al. 2005:467). This seems more in line with the suggestions made by other academics, as presented above.

4.2 The role of popular opinion

The institutional explanations and solutions proposed also make assumptions about the human and individual motives that lead to opposition.

The top-down approach of the central Government is believed to contribute to local opposition because it creates feelings of estrangement, mistrust and unfairness and evokes worries over landscape impact (Wolsink 2007; Wüstenhagen et al. 2007). Underlying this view seems to be an assumption that individual support for wind power is qualified (in line with Bell et al.’s (2005) terminology). This implies that opinions towards wind power are not negative as such, but that individuals place certain restrictions on wind power development when faced with specific schemes (ibid.). This explains why opinion polls reveal a strong pro-stance toward wind power in the general public, which is not matched by opinions towards specific projects where people’s qualifications come to show. Wolsink (2007) has shown that when faced with specific projects, worries over landscape impact and other dimensions of the specific project come to the fore, while arguments over

environmental benefits become less important. Several researchers claim that landscape concerns and visual impact is the number one aspect people are likely to put restrictions on (Warren et al. 2005; Wolsink 2007). This must be seen in relation to national identity where cultural romantic views of the countryside dates back to the early 19th century (Toke et al. 2008).

Appropriate responses in dealing with qualified support coincide with those already mentioned. This involves building trust with locals and dealing with the qualifications put on wind power. Bell et al. (2005:468) suggests that if local concerns are seen as unfounded, a main strategy would be to provide information in an attempt to change people's minds. If, however, objections are seen as valid, the strategy should be to accommodate these concerns by changing elements of the development. The need to provide information and knowledge is supported by several academics (Strachan and Lal 2004; Strachan et al. 2006). However, others question how much effect increased information really can have (Wolsink 2007). This because the knowledge claims in the wind power debate are highly contested. What the Government and the pro-wind lobby present as "facts", are often seen differently by anti-wind NGOs. Furthermore, if support is qualified, this implies that people already see the benefits of wind power. Therefore information campaigns centring on the usefulness of wind power may have little success (Bell et al. 2005). This being said, when concerns relate to specific project features i.e. the effect of wind turbines on birds, information provision from sources that the public can trust, such as the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), may help. Here one is not attempting to alter people's value systems, but rather to provide them with information from which they have a stronger basis for making judgments (Bell et al. 2005:469).

An alternate individual explanation is the NIMBY explanation. Although having come under heavy scrutiny in the academic literature, Bell et al. (2005) claim that properly understood, it can offer a specific explanation of local opposition as the result of a "particular kind of action problem". The NIMBY explanation contends that people support wind energy in general, but oppose particular developments for self-interest reasons. This points to a particular collective action problem, where some "free ride" off the contributions of others. The logic of action behind this phenomenon is that one individual's contribution to solving a problem is negligible, while the cost of making this contribution is considerable (Bell et al. 2005:465). The public good is not provided when the sum of individuals make this calculation (ibid.; Wolsink 2000).

If the problem is NIMBY, possible measures include: promoting authoritarian solutions, attempting to promote a sense of "environmental citizenship", or increasing personal benefit from wind energy development (Bell et al. 2005:472-473). Authoritarian solutions bring their sets of problems as people might feel further estranged from the system leading to heightened opposition. Promoting environmental citizenship effectively is no easy job and can take years to accomplish. Increasing personal benefits could take the

form of either financial compensation or locally owned wind power developments. However, in opting for such schemes one must assure that people see this as an acceptable form of compensation (ibid.).

With these competing individual explanations for local opposition, how can we know which is more prevalent? Furthermore, do these mechanisms explain opposition fronted by a minority of locals (represented by local NGOs) who dominate in decision-making, while a majority actually support the schemes unconditionally? Or is public opposition towards *specific* wind power schemes, fundamentally different from opposition towards wind power in *general*?

If specific support is fundamentally different than general support, this implies that in the face of specific projects most people will actually have reservations, meaning that it is more than a “democratic deficit” that needs to be fixed. It seems likely that most people will put some restrictions on wind power when faced with a specific project (Bell et al. 2005). However, is it possible that the support for wind power in the community is not fundamentally different than support on a national level and that in fact the democratic deficit exists? Is it possible that a majority, even in the immediate vicinity of proposed scheme, are positive, but that the system fails to capture this? This is currently unclear. However, it is clear that opponents do not need to represent a majority of the community, in order to effectively fight a proposed development (Toke 2005a). It has also been shown that it is often the very closest people to a wind power development who determine the outcome of planning applications (ibid.). This can be seen in connection with positive groups not being as “loud” as opposition groups.

The question then becomes; do we need a system that allows for increasing the power of the majority over decision-making; or are we dealing with more fundamental challenges concerning the “top-down” approach to wind power development adopted by government and business today, which does not allow for reconciliation of the different discourses promoted in the debate. To efficiently address the opposition challenge, it is also key to map whether opponents want increased control in the planning process (more democratic processes and more influence) or compensation (financial rewards, ownership schemes etc.) (see Bell et al. 2005:474). A clarification seems much needed on these issues in order to design effective policy responses.

4.3 The role of organized groups

Planning systems, energy policy, and weaknesses in organization all go some way in explaining why opposition occurs. Nevertheless, stopping a planning application also demands effective organization. Negative views will always exist and will not by definition lead to active and organized opposition (van der Horst 2007). It is the representation and interaction of these negative views with political institutions that cause

planning applications to be stopped. Here the strong social coalitions, represented by various NGOs, become relevant.

Coalitions of NGOs and social networks are seen as an important conditioning factor explaining the strength of local opposition in the UK (Toke et al. 2008). It is through public debate in local arenas, that opinions are formed.

Well-organized local anti-wind farm groups, expressing an active concern in the immediate vicinities of proposed wind farms, have a clear impact on planning outcome (Toke 2005a:1536). However, their mere existence does not grant them power. Effective lobbying and organization are crucial (ibid.). Haggett and Toke (2006) have argued that it is necessary for these groups to avoid claims of self interest and NIMBYism, and to found their anti-wind arguments on universalized criteria such as landscape or environmental concern. Lobbying a range of external groups, such as landscape NGOs, is thus crucial to add legitimacy to the case.

Landscape-protection NGOs are also well recognized as having impact on the outcome of planning applications, and are given much attention within the academic literature (Toke 2005a; Haggett and Toke 2006; Toke et al. 2008). It is shown that while a minority of cases are affected by environmental disputes, a majority of cases are affected by disputes over landscape. While Haggett and Toke (2006) have shown that the opinion of landscape-protection groups associates strongly with the outcome of local authority planning decisions, they have also shown that their positions are largely formed in response to feelings of the locals towards proposed projects. CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England) objections are also influenced by locally based anti-wind farm groups who lobby them (Toke 2005a). In light of this, one can propose that the impact of landscape-protection groups may largely be a function of the intensity of local campaigning efforts and common perceptions on local landscape value (Haggett and Toke 2006:111). Another group established to have influence, although to a different degree, is the RSPB. Holding qualified support for wind power, the RSPB have shown that once wind power schemes are built to minimize impact on birds and wildlife, they will support it. The restrictions they have put on wind power, have largely been taken into account by developers, perhaps because these are more easily accommodated than landscape concerns.

The anti-wind umbrella NGOs and pro-wind NGOs are somewhat less discussed in the academic literature. The pro-wind NGOs behind the Yes2Wind website, are clearly working under the assumption that there is a silent majority in favour of specific wind power schemes, but that they are simply not organized in the way that the local anti-wind NGOs are. This bears clear reference to the democratic deficit explanation introduced by Bell et al. (2005). By mobilizing the public to voice support through local networks, they believe a better balance can be achieved vis-à-vis the negative views that are getting attention within the current system. It seems that mobilizing positive public opinion might help to a certain extent. As shown, anti-wind campaigners may not represent communities

as a whole, but instead a small fragment eagerly voicing their opinion (Toke 2005a). Hence exposing positive opinions can be important. Nevertheless, it is unclear how strong these attitudes actually are in local communities. Research has shown that there are a number of factors that may lead locals to put restrictions on wind power, especially prior to schemes being built. It is in fact contended that general support for wind power is categorically different than support for specific schemes (Wolsink 2007). This seems to be something the pro-wind NGOs are underplaying. Little recognition is given to the weaknesses of the system and energy policy. It is therefore unclear what impact such a strategy may have. This being said, academics like Toke (2005a) contend that this sort of work is important in providing balance against the anti-wind lobby.

The anti-wind umbrella organizations are less discussed in the academic literature. They are generally newer institutions without the historic roots that organizations such as CPRE and RSPB have. Furthermore, their anti-wind arguments are generally different from the more established international environmental organizations such as Greenpeace, WWF and Friends of the Earth, who often argue the exact opposite. Since they function as a resource to local campaigners, their importance seems largely determined by the attitudes of locals.

The discursive claims and uncertainties within the wind power debate are opening up for a wide array of NGOs taking part in the debate and attempting to convince locals of their position. The open truth claims and uncertainties in the debate allow for NGOs with opposing discourses to exist side by side.



5 Conclusion: can the tide be turned?

The UK provides a clear example of how political commitment to renewables is not sufficient for effective implementation of wind power schemes. Local opposition, organized through various NGOs and channelled through the planning system, is posing a serious threat to the fulfilment of governmental targets on renewables. Although a pro-wind lobby attempts to counter-balance this threat, local opposition to wind power remains a challenge in the UK.

The research reviewed in this paper has provided explanations on opposition categorized into three; the role of institutions; the role of popular opinion; and the role of organized groups. This categorization provides a framework to look at the problems and solutions associated with local opposition by interlinking institutional problems, to individual thinking and group organization. The research reveals that institutional factors pertaining to the organization of wind power, the overarching energy policy, and the planning system are important drivers for local opposition. The top-down and business orientation of Government is leading to feelings of estrangement and mistrust on an individual level. Within the current system locals are bearing the costs of wind power, without having much say in how it affects them. NGOs in this respect function as an organizational platform from which to derive legitimacy to the cause, and to effectively channel frustration into action.

Many researchers are positive that local opposition can diminish if the institutional framework on a *national* level, sufficiently allows for collaborative and fair decision-making on a *local* level. Although fundamental rejection of wind power is hard to alter, many individuals and NGOs are believed to hold qualified support for wind power. As a response to this it is suggested that stronger local involvement, more cases of local ownership, democratic forums and strengthened communication processes, are central to gain support.

There are, however, inconsistencies within the literature, that need to be addressed in order to design efficient policy responses. This concerns whether the problem of opposition is mainly one of incorrect representation, where opponents of wind power (considered to be a minority in this view) are able to dominate in the planning system; or if *general* support for wind power is fundamentally different from support for *specific* schemes. A central question becomes: Do we need to increase the power of the majority over decision-making; or are the changes needed more fundamental? It is also important to clarify whether opponents are seeking control, and hence influence, over their own

situation; or if they are seeking compensation for the inconveniences/disturbances wind power brings.

Throughout the literature there is much optimism for successful implementation of wind power if local communities are empowered. Few, however, dare question whether this is sufficient, thereby considering the need for more authoritarian solutions. This is consistent with the move away from NIMBY as the focus of research on local opposition. However, it seems clear that with the strong UK targets on renewables, each community will have to pay a price in meeting national and international commitments on climate change. As seen through the work of the various NGOs, some are questioning if this price is too high.

This points to an inherent value conflict manifested in the wind power debate, and seen clearly in the conflicts between the pro- and anti-wind lobbies. Questions are raised concerning whether building extensive wind power schemes in the name of climate change, can legitimize destroying valuable landscape. This is strengthened by the fact that scientific explanations don't give clear answers as to whether current technology and policies on wind power make alleviation of climate change possible. Taking rising energy consumption into consideration, it is also unclear if wind power will ultimately contribute to absolute GHG-reductions. Subsequently, small communities bear the cost of renewable schemes that are to benefit the nation as a whole. Behind the moral and simplistic claims thrown between various pro- and anti-wind lobbies, lurk some very real and legitimate concerns with no easy solutions. These may also need to be acknowledged by the central Government when attempting to deal with local opposition.

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