

Us, and them: Lines of conflict, identities, and socially constructed spaces in the context of siting decisions for wind energy developments

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There is much research on conflicts revolving around the issue of finding sites for wind turbines, with empirical evidence from many countries. Some authors point to the salience of spatially referenced identities, which have also been conceptualised as place attachment. Furthermore, scholars from social and cultural geography have analysed the social construction of spaces from various theoretic angles.

The aim of this contribution is to present two types of linkages between collective identities and socially constructed spaces in the context of siting-decisions for wind energy developments. The empirical findings are taken from two case studies in Germany: one in the town of Wolfhagen in northern Hesse and the other one in the Saxon region Upper Elbe Val-ley/East Ore Mountains.

The analytical framework is rooted in poststructuralist discourse theory, epitomised by authors such as Laclau, Mouffe, Howarth and others, as well as in Foucault's notions of subjectivity and rationality as components of his governmentality perspective. In methodical terms, the case studies rely on newspaper analyses, semi-structured interviews and partly also on participant observation.

Notwithstanding the distinct institutional settings of the two cases, it is interesting to see that the Wolfhagen wind energy controversy led to a sharp division of the local community and spurred the emergence of two antagonistic identities. Each of them is linked to specific constructions of the Roedeser Berg, the (then) proposed site of a wind farm. By contrast, in the Saxon region, a powerful discourse evolved in which the identity of the affected villages was constructed in sharp antagonism to the nearby state capital of Dresden.

The paper concludes with some thoughts, firstly, on the interrelations between local discourses on wind energy and the wider discursive environment in which they are embedded and, secondly, on possibilities of influencing such discourses strategically.