

Communities and space-related conflicts over wind farms: Insights from the UK and Denmark

David Rudolph

Technical University of Denmark

Contact: dpru@dtu.dk

Technological advancements in renewables, in particular wind energy, have transformed wind farms into critical infrastructures that evoke an ideological battle between small traditional co-operative and large-scale commercial projects. While locally-rooted wind farm projects are supposed to feature an inherent local acceptability due to local involvement and revenues, corporate developers of commercial projects have to gain public acceptance. The paper will present a synopsis of empirical findings from research projects conducted in the UK and Denmark in order to illuminate the contentious interplay between community engagement, ownership, benefits and the siting of offshore and onshore wind farms in different institutional settings.

By applying a developer's perspective it will be highlighted that wind farm developers are not a homogenous group, but consist of different actors of various constellations, such as energy companies, regional utilities, associations, citizens or private landowners, with different approaches to the development of wind farms. While the delivery of community benefits from and local co-ownership of commercial projects in the UK usually take place on a voluntary basis, efforts of large developers have led to a wide range of benefit models for onshore and offshore wind farms that give evidence of good practice beyond legal compliance. In contrast, although the Danish renewable Energy Act comprises obligatory but confined measures to increase acceptance through community ownership and benefit, it will be shown that developers increasingly face challenges of finding adequate sites and getting access to land for large onshore projects in the first place, which has resulted in 'new' practices to avoid spatial conflicts.

The paper concludes with some preliminary thoughts on the implications of a new support scheme for renewables based on a tendering/auction system imposed by the EU and currently being implemented in the member states.