Political Space: Consensus-Dissensus and Deliberative Practice

‘Creating Legitimacy in Wind Turbine Planning’
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Outline

- Participation and wind energy projects;
- Space as a political metaphor;
- Collaboration and the pursuit of consensus;
- Acknowledging and valuing dissensus;
- Towards agonistic practice...
Thousands protest against pylons and wind turbines

Demonstrators march through Dublin in opposition to energy plans

Controversial windfarm plans are withdrawn

Wind energy in the Netherlands: the storm has not yet calmed down

Columns

They had come to Amsterdam by the dozens, to the Wind Energy Debate, to let themselves be heard. Opponents of wind energy. Their numbers and particularly their zest testified to it that the debate on wind energy has not calmed down by far. With such motivated opponents, the realisation of the goals of last year’s international Energy Agreement is by no means a done deal yet.

Eco-Blowback: Mutiny in the Land of Wind Turbines

By Matthias Schulz

Windfarm opponents to run in general election

Wednesday, October 28, 2015

By Flavio Ó Connaithe

Irish Examiner Reporter

Battle over wind turbines in the land of Sleeping Beauty

By Matt McGrath

Environment correspondent, BBC News
Host community opposition to wind energy projects is generally driven by:

- **Health and environmental impacts;**
  - Concerns over visual, bio-diversity, well-being impacts on local area etc;

- **Perceived distribution of costs & benefits;**
  - Fear that external companies accrue key benefits, while local communities bear main costs;

- **Fairness of decision-making process;**
  - Lack of trust in developers, regulators and the transparency of the consenting regime;
Thinking about participation and wind energy projects

- Trust and exclusion are some of the drivers of opposition to local development.
- ... Is more participation the silver bullet for social acceptance?
- ... however in many countries, the response has been ‘streamlining’ and closing down opportunities for participation.

These respectively imply:
- Seeking consensus can resolve disputes; or
- Conflict is inevitable and should be avoided;

How do we think of these issues in a theoretical context?
‘Spaces’ as a political/participation metaphor

‘Space’ in participation discourse:
‘Let’s widen/deepen/extend participation’

However it also has strong theoretical/metaphorical qualities (Lefebvre, Bourdieu, Foucault). For example:
- Opened/closed
- Bounded/open
- Isolated/numerous
- Filled/empty/selectively occupied
- Invited/popular
Spaces of participation

- May be created by the state, private sector or civil society and located/displaced in or between any of these;
- New ways can occupy old spaces, or old ways can occupy new spaces;
- Unusual spaces can disrupt taken from granted rules and create new meanings or practices (‘heterotopias’);
- All spaces will have traces of their ‘generative past’ (Lefebvre) and reflective of power relations
Concepts of spaces for participation

- Cornwall (2002):
  - **Regularised relations**: created and operated by the state and act as a nexus between people and government
  - **Fleeting formations**: One off meetings aimed at opening deliberation, with radical possibilities.
  - **Alternative interfaces**: Outside the state aimed at policy advocacy or replacing the functions of the state
  - **Movements and moments**: spontaneous and ephemeral, protests, voicing complaints etc.

- Benhabib (1996):
  - **Associational space**: co-operative working respectfully for consensus
  - **Agnostic space**: competitive and contested
Communicative turn in the 1990s led to the emergence of the paradigm of Collaborative Planning theory and related normative versions of institutional design (Healey 1997);

Many facets but here focused on Habermas notion of a space (Öffenlichkeit) outside domain of the state is a precondition for citizen engagement;

From here consensus can be attained through public deliberation;

Based on the idea that communicative rationality is an alternative to the ‘calculating and homogenising’ instrumental rationality;

Assumes conditions for ‘ideal speech situation’, now seen to be a little naive and overly normative.
Practice forms of Collaborative Planning

- Normative versions of planning and participation;
- Inclusion and acknowledgment of multitude of stakeholders;
- New professional roles; Planners as mediators.

Attracted wide ranging criticism based on acknowledgment of the ‘dark-side’ of planning, including acknowledgment of power/knowledge and planning as a form of social control.
Consensus in the wind sector?
Chantal Mouffe (1993) theory of the political rejects liberal notions of consensus - democracy needs adversaries to engage in agnostic conflict.

Agonism – irresolvable disagreements in recognition of legitimacy of opinions.

Pluralism is welcomed – citizens of good faith can agree; and disagree robustly and honestly.
Exploring agonistic approaches

- Opponents’ rather than enemies;
- Seeks settlement of difference, rather than consensus;
- Recognises conflict and struggles is both inevitable and intrinsically good for democracy;
- Engagement – both for and against - is welcomed and encouraged.
Civic Republicanism

- Emphasises ideas of civic responsibility, community and the common good;
- Recognises the potential for debate to lead to unforeseen collective solutions;
- Principles of “non-domination” not “non-interference”;
- Majoritarian decision making not just consensus;
- It is a duty to engage in politics and perhaps good citizens object to wind farms?
Wind farm disputes

Wind farm conflicts are not a clash of “facts”, but of values related to:
- Governance
- Participation
- Technology
- Power distribution
- Landscape aesthetics

It is an overtly political arena.

Disputes cannot therefore be settled just by establishing good evidence, but express deeper values that inform both opposition and support, not more “facts”.
Tunnes Plateau: idealised objector discourses

- Anti-Wind Power - Local Resister
  Deeply sceptical of the concept of wind power, shows confidence that the project can be resisted through local activism.

- Wind Power-Supporter - Siting Sheriff
  Offers support to the concept of wind power but expresses major site-specific concerns related to the Tunes Plateau proposal.

- Anti-Developer – Local Pragmatist
  Deep suspicion of wind farm developers, less concerned about “big” issues like climate change, most motivated by the potential of tangible local impacts, such as the loss of jobs.

- Economic Sceptic - Siting Compromiser
  Most concerned with shorter term, impacts of the proposed scheme, willing to consider other siting option as and applies a more reasoned, economic rationale to evaluating wind power.
Tunnes Plateau: Idealised supporter discourses

- **Rationalising Globally - Sacrificing Locally:**
  Deeply concerned about climate change and energy security, suggests that addressing these challenges should override any local impacts.

- **Local Pastoralist – Developer Sceptic**
  A more traditional, pastoral view of the environment, unhappy about potential impacts on the North Coast. Offers reluctant support in the recognition of the need for more sustainable energy.

- **Embrace Wind**
  Very strong belief in wind power, future-orientated and uncritical of the proposal and wind farms developers.

- **Site Specific Supporter – Energy Pragmatist**
  High level of concern with energy issues, a more pragmatic outlook, resulting in site-specific support for the Tunes Plateau scheme.
Beyond consensus: Towards agonistic practice?

- What are the key objectives in renewable development?
  - Developer profits?
  - Energy securing?
  - Reducing emissions etc?
- How would we get the diversity of community option to settle on progressive energy futures?
Action on local energy

Local carbon economy

Denial of energy crisis

Low carbon initiatives through local bargaining

Conflict and stalemate around status quo

Inaction on local energy
Action on local energy

Consensus

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Dissensus
Final words

- The conceptual value of ‘spatial’ thinking;
- Trust in communities, rather than building their trust in government agencies;
- Recognition that there may be many pathways to low carbon communities;
- Ideas of consensus has implicit power relations and related to specific institutional forms;
- New processes and new spaces can result in alternative frames and action;
- What other forms of agonistic process would be useful?
- How can good faith be maintained?
- What are the implications for institutional design?
“Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning... Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”

Frederick Douglass (1818-1895)
North Star, August 4, 1857
Useful references

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Thank you, any questions?

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