# Paradoxical landscapes: perceptions and social acceptance related to grid development

Susana Batel (University of Exeter/Cis, ISCTE-IUL)
Patrick Devine-Wright (University of Exeter)
Helene Egeland (SINTEF Energi AS)
Gerd B. Jacobsen (SINTEF Energi AS)
Marte Qvenild (Norwegian Institute for Nature Research)

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# Public responses to renewable energy technologies What can be acceptable locations?

- Visual impacts:
  - Wind farms - *if the perceived visual quality of a project is positive, people will probably support it* (Wolsink, 2000, p.51)
  - *social acceptability of a pre-given technology but (...) <u>in particular places</u>* (Cowell, 2010, p.223)

- Sense of place/Place attachment vs. NIMBY to understand different responses (e.g., Devine-Wright, 2009; Devine-Wright & Howes, 2010):
  - Including that in decison-making processes
  - Place identity/attachment as pre-existing relation/identity (?)

# A place for everything and everything in its place Representing and change

- Landscape perception
  - Quality of landscapes **+** degree of 'naturalness'
  - Quality of landscapes **–** disturbance: Associated with presence of human-made elements (Tveit et al., 2006; Soini et al., 2011)
    - Natural landscape vs. Human landscapes – two different essences?
- Cultural geography
  - Landscape/**Countryside in Britain: cultural representation** shaping attitudes towards countryside conservation (Woods, 2005; Wallwork & Dixon, 2004)
- Social Psychology
  - **Essentialisation** as representational and identity tool for making sense of inter-group relations (Wagner et al., 2010) and other social objects (e.g., GMO's - Kronberger & Wagner, 2007)
    - **Epistemic function and moral function**

# A place for everything and everything in its place Essentialisation and resistance to new technologies
(Wagner et al., 2010; Kronberger & Wagner, 2007)

1) What are **essences - Unalterable by human intervention/part of the natural order:** When altered through mixing with another essence = Feelings of **repugnance, threat, ugliness, danger; YUCK** /Objectification - **monstruous, alien, hybrid**;

2) **Essence construction** and its enactment in practice ( vs. result of some pre-existing identity**) has the purpose of letting the goup appear as an entity with a reason to exist, an ideology, an agenda, and a series of distinguishing attribute**s;

3**) Essentializing tendencies might differ between social situations** as in cognitive polyphasia – **be used strategically?**

# A place for everything and everything in its place Essentialisation and resistance – <u>Goals</u>

1) Place identity as pre-existing relation/identity? ➔ **What functions can particular representations of and relations with landscape/place serve?**

2) Essentialisation as a way to make sense of the world with epistemic and moral functions:

- Are landscapes and pylons/HVPL seens as having different essences? Does essentialisation **play a role in people's representations of place in the context of responses to energy infrastructures**? In which ways?

3) **What consequences** for the deployment HVPL and associated energy technologies, namely, **for the definition of acceptable locations**? **Can mitigation measures play a role in that?**

# Method

- Part of a larger study (interviews with MP's, policy-makers, parish councilors, wildlife and landscape NGO's...)

- Focus groups (*N*=7/8, UK, *Medium length*=1h30min) with members of local communities to be affected by HVPL's – 2 case studies (4 FG's by case study) – data also collected in Norway but nor reported here

- Themes explored: relation with place, the need for the HVPL project and positions regarding it/impacts, technology preferences  for the project (e.g., overhead lines vs undergrounding, pylon design, routing),...

# Case studies_UK

**2. Midwales – to connect with wind farms [**Llanymynech, Welshpool**]**

**1. Hinkley Point C – to connect with nuclear power station [**Yatton, Nailseax2, Portbury**]**



Hogwarts

Scotland

Aberdeen

Dundee

Stirling

Edinburgh

Glasgow

Newcastle

Bangor

Belfast

United Kingdom

Ireland

Hull

York

Liverpool

Sheffield

Bangor

Nottingham

Norwich

Wales

England

Cambridge

Oxford

London

Cardiff

Bristol

Plymouth

Channel Islands

St. Anne
Alderney

St. Peter Port
Guernsey

Herm
Jethou
Sark

Jersey

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# 1.1. Feelings about the mixing up of essences

I: *So what were your first reactions then when you first found out about it?*

P5: ***Disgust*** **[Douglas, 1966 – dirt]**

P3: *I was **horrified***

P1: Ab*solute **horror**- horror* [Llanymynech1, 31:65-68]

I: *So how would the rest of you summarise your position regarding this project and why*

P6: ***threatened*** [Portbury, 34:41-42]

P1: *and you see South Wales Docks and you think 'Oh my God that's **horrible'**, go over the other side, look from South Wales back to Bristol and you think '**Yuck**, that's even worse'* [Nailsea2, 30:63]

# 1.2. Perceptions about visuality
The objectification of pylons in the landscape

P1: *But I think it will be said if when we're driving out when we see these **horrible huge things**, if they really are a **monstrosity** then we'll all be kicking ourselves* [Nailsea1,29:129] **[Kronberger & Wagner, 2007 – inhumane]**

P2: *And it's going to look **ugly**.* [Nailsea2, 30:128]

P1: ***It looks revolting*** *it does look **horrendous*** [Portbury, 34:48]

P5: ***Evil*** [Llanymynech1, 31:162]

# 1.3. The essence of the landscape-countryside vs. industrialized Britain

P5: ***the atmosphere** …. It **is <span style="color:red">spiritual</span>** dare I say you know and it's not going **to get destroyed by these*** [Llanymynech, 31:33]

P2: *Extremely tall kind of like towers which **bear no resemblance to the countryside** they're passing through and are **imposed on the landscape rather than growing out of it** …* [Llanymynech1, 31:163]

P4 – (…) *the cars going through Mid Wales and coming on holiday here and people do initially feel their **getting an escape from industrialised Britain** and **you know built up Britain** to be able to go to <u>somewhere</u> with **a beautiful natural environment** and in a way you know <u>there's a criticism that we are somehow NIMBYS but it's not just that you're also again custodians of this area</u> (…) <u>which is for the enjoyment of all of us and the visitors</u>* [Welshpool, 20:94]

P4 – (…) *Town and Country Planning Act (…) has been **protection for the countryside** you could see this kind of **urban sprawl that was going to <u>be eating into our countryside and denied the nation of that place where you could actually go</u>** to (…) **it's a big national thing** and **this isn't just about us (…) about all of this countryside** now* [Welshpool, 20:158]

P7: (…) ***you are in a village in the middle of … the country*** [Portbury, 34:17]

# 2. The essence of the British countryside - But…
some *sides* have more *country* than others

P5 - *Montgomeryshire is a very rural county (…), very beautiful landscapes* **rolling valleys and hills** *um* **very green**

P6 - *I think it's like* **the greenest county in Wales** *(…) the* **rolling hills** *and I've had the experience of living in other areas (…) where are hills and mountains but they are not -* **you know none of those counties are as green and as rolling as this county** [Welshpool, 20:6/7] [Rose, 1995 - England = a landscape of **green rolling hills**]

P5 – *(…)* **it's just pretty flat open countryside**

P6 - **Precisely yes which is fine isn't it**

P5- **less um… obtrusive in that sort of landscape** *than they potentially would* **in our landscape** [Welshpool, 20:184]

- Essentialisation as a representational and identity used in people's responses to HVPL;
- An individual, cultural, relational/contextual and institutional process (Town and Country Planning Act – Cowell, 2010) ;
- And a political one, can be strategically used

# 3.1. What consequences for the deployment of HVPL? What can be acceptable locations?

P5 - *it's strange **if you drive over the M62** from Manchester towards Leeds and you've got **all this moorland at two thousand feet boring landscape, motorway runs through it**,* <u>*and you can't see a turbine anywhere*</u> **[Already hybrid ones, lacking the essence of the countryside]**

P4 - ***Or by virtue of the South Downs there's a huge area there you know where people don't live so it's got a low population*** **[Low populated]**

P1- ***There it's not going to impact anybody who lives around because there's hardly anybody living around there you know*** [Welshpool, 20:127/128]

P1 - **Norway they've got lots of pylons there and they there - and they there are all next to the motorway** [Yatton, 24:26]

## 3.2. What are acceptable locations? What do those living in hybrid, low populated areas say about it?

P2 - *so the other half of the village is the other side of the motorway one of the concerns about the motorway of course is that **now they've created a motorway it's also an excuse to put other services along the side of it underneath it through it above it*** [Portbury, 34:8]

P7 - *I think a positive thing about living in our village is that almost wherever you look or wherever you stand at the moment **to all intents and purposes you are in a village in the middle of … the country** (…) **the Green um and the views*** [Portbury, 34:16]

P7 - ***It's a pretty low density of population isn't it you wouldn't go and stick it just to the West of London would you because there would be absolute bloody uproar** and Oh! The MPs might get a slap over the head No! It's out in the sticks isn't it you know **we're vulnerable to it and you know if there is an objection there's not many people who are going to object*** [Yatton, 24:149]

- Reification: prescribing representations of what a valuable landscape is and excluding the perspective of others (Patel & Castro, 2009)

## 4.1. What can be acceptable locations then? The role of mitigation measures in preserving the essence of the countryside

**Undergrounding/subsea**

P2 – **In a perfect world it would all be underground wouldn't it?** [Nailsea 2, 29:72]

P5 – if they said "Right we'll bury your cables" and then people would say **"We'll help you dig the channel because we understand it that it might have to come through and …."** [Llanymynech1, 31:142]

P2 - **It would bring phenomenal destruction** [Welshpool, 20:122/173]

**New pylon designs**

P1 - **a pylon is a pylon is a pylon it's still a scar on the landscape** [Welshpool, 20:182]

P4 – if **that pylon look like a tree** or whatever it might be then possibly yeah [Nailsea 2, 29:114]

**Routing** – context-specific

**Camouflaging** – Not frequently referred to

**Community benefits** – paying less for electricity; mainly seen as bribery

## 4.2. What can be acceptable locations then? The role of perspective-taking and 'group dilberation'

P3 - *Well **nobody wants it, that's the thing***

P5 - ***I think personally it needs to go through***, <u>*there is a debate obviously with whether it should go underground or over ground*</u> *and I think **we're probably all NIMBYs, we don't want it in our backyard do we?*** [Nailsea1, 29:39/56]

P3 – (...) ***don't get me wrong I'm not talking about anyone here but the people who complain about it the first day they come home and flick that switch and the electricity won't come on*** *(...) across the estuary* [talking about severn barrage] *and things like that **because there's always-there's always somebody to upset no matter what you're doing*** [Llanymynech2, 19:30]

- Flexibility (vs. rigidity – Zerubavel, 1993) and consensualisation (Batel & Castro, 2009) – e.g., throughout FG's on energy consumption issues

# Conclusions

1)  Importance of going beyond the conception of relations with place and landscape has value free in research into public's responses to energy infrastructures

2)  Essentialization processes play a role in public responses to HVPL and have a moral and political function which can be contextually used and lead to the exclusion of other's perspectives (within the same community, other communities in the country, or in the world)

3)  The moral and political function of essentialisation: Are there any possible locations for energy infrastructures then?

    1)  Fully undergrounding – but costs/willingness to pay;

    2)  Perspective-taking/flexibility (vs. Rigidity/essentializing) – A better understanding of these processes

# Discussion

- Differences between places– rural, semi-urban/rural

- How responses to energy infrastructures and the use of essentialization of place/landscape is linked with other issues at local and global levels – e.g, immigration

  *you could see this kind of **urban sprawl that was going to <u>be eating into our countryside and denied the nation of that place where you could actually go</u>** to* [Welshpool, 20:158]

- Progressive sense of place (Massey, 1995)/de-essentialization (Wagner et al., 2010 – related with political affiliation)

- Policy-making and planning – fostering essentialisation? (Cowell, 2010)