

# Varieties of place attachment, 'NIMBYism' and the social acceptance of controversial energy technologies

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Despite a burgeoning interest in place attachment in recent years, relatively few empirical studies, using either qualitative or quantitative methods, have investigated different varieties of place attachment. One exception is a recent study in Poland (Lewicka, forthcoming in 2011) that employed quantitative survey methods to identify two forms of attachment to place (dubbed 'inherited' and 'discovered') and three forms of detachment from place (alienation, placelessness and relativism). This study aimed to replicate Lewicka's findings in a UK context and to extend them by investigating the relationship between forms of attachment and public objections to energy technology proposals, often dubbed 'NIMBYism'. The context of the research was controversial proposals to construct a high voltage electricity power line across a 60km stretch of countryside in the South West of England.

Building on previous research approaching 'NIMBYism' through the lens of place attachment and place identity, this paper presents findings from a survey of 503 adults resident in the town of Nailsea, where a local group (Save our Valley) was set up to oppose the line. The goals of the research were to identify residents' sense of place (by means of qualitative analysis of free association data) and to investigate the relation between forms of place attachment (inherited and discovered), levels of acceptance of the power line and protest behaviours.

Qualitative analyses revealed the town to be associated with symbolic meanings

concerning rurality, tranquility, community spirit and a pleasant mode of living, which were threatened by a power line considered to negatively impact on children's health, property values and landscape character. Quantitative analyses replicated Lewicka's findings concerning the socio-demographic correlates of attachment types: 'discovered' place attachment was associated with higher educational attainment, shorter length of residence in the area, and higher involvement in local civic organizations (including the protest group) in comparison to 'inherited' place attachment. Furthermore, analyses indicated differences in the ways that each type of attachment was associated with acceptance of the power line: whilst a significant negative relation was found between levels of power line acceptance and the 'discovered' form of attachment, no significant relation was found between acceptance and 'inherited' place attachment. Implications of the findings for the literatures on place attachment and 'NIMBYism', as well as their applied implications for energy policy are discussed.

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## **References**

Lewicka, M. (forthcoming in 2011). On the varieties of people's relationships with places: Hummon's typology revisited. *Environment and Behavior*