

Close residents of wind farms: What predicts their acceptance and rejection behaviors?

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Introduction

Despite positive public opinion towards wind power, implementing wind farms often raises hostility among residents. Most of previous researches highlighted practical factors such as noise, landscape or financial concerns (Sitborek, 2008; Jones & Eiser, 2010). Psychosocial factors have rarely been investigated, even if a recent research has evidenced the relevance of emotions and attitudinal ambivalence when predicting ecological behaviors (Dardenne et al., 2010).

The aim of our study is to identify which social-psychological factors predict acceptance or rejection of wind farm projects among residents. More specifically, we aim to identify the predictors of close residents' behavioral responses to wind farm projects.

In accordance with planned-behavior theory (Ajzen, 1991), we expect residents' specific attitudes towards the wind farm, perceived social norms, and perceived behavioral control to be major determinants of acceptance/rejection. We also investigate the predictive role of identity, emotions, attitudinal ambivalence, justice and image of the developer, as new predictors.

Four localities were selected, corresponding to four possible issues: one in which the farm is built and effective (sample1), one in which it is being built at the moment (sample2), one which will be built in 2012 (sample3), and one in which the project has been rejected (sample4). Residents were approached by a door-to-door procedure to ensure a high response rate (see Jones & Eiser, 2009). A questionnaire and a pre-paid envelope were left in their post box in case they were not at home. A total of 279 questionnaires were completed.

A series of hierarchical regression analyses indicate that new predictors are significant, above the impact of planned-behavior theory predictors. More specifically, knowledge about the farm predicts a higher perceived justice, which predicts a positive attitude towards the farm, which then predicts more acceptance and less rejection behaviors. Moreover, emotions towards the farm and image of the developer both appear to be reciprocally linked to perceived justice and to predict attitude towards the farm.

Our study is innovative in four ways. First, data are collected among close residents of wind farms and goes beyond general public opinion. Second, it relates on the largely validated planned-behavior theory and applies it to the new research area of wind energy. Third, it goes beyond attitudes to investigate behaviors. Finally, it focuses on social-psychological predictors rarely investigated in previous research.

References

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