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A Landscape Of One's Own: A Commentary On 'Understanding Responses to a UK High-Voltage Powerline Proposal: The Role Of Place And Project-Based Social Representations'

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Bailey, Devine-Wright and Batel's (2016) paper, published in this special issue of *Papers on Social Representations* (25(1), 2.1-2.23, Ecological Crisis, Sustainability and Social Worlds: Developing a Critical Agenda), is a worthy illustration of the importance of going beyond individualistic interpretations of the relation between people and the environment, by awarding significance to social and contextual factors, including social representations of landscape, social constructions of meaning and of place identity and symbolic interpretations of place change. By drawing on social representations theory, it moves away from the research that focuses solely on attitudes and behaviour that is so frequent in environmental psychology.

The concept of place attachment applied to renewable energy by Devine-Wright (see for example Devine-Wright 2009 or Devine-Wright and Howes 2010) has played a fundamental role in rejecting the NIMBY explanations for resistance to these energy infrastructures. Rather than placing the blame on residents that refuse wind turbines for selfish motives, place attachment reframes the protests as a "place-protective action, which arises when new developments disrupt pre-existing emotional attachments and

threaten place-related identity processes" (Devine-Wright 2009, p. 426). My own work on community responses to wind farms and solar power plants in Portugal (Delicado et al. 2014; Delicado, Figueiredo and Silva 2016) has greatly benefited from the use of the concept of place attachment. Negative perceptions of these infrastructures are strongly influenced by the value attached to particular landscapes, considered as local landmarks, spoiled by the intrusion of wind turbines. Conversely, renewable energy plants can contribute to generate new local identities: such was the case of a solar farm that helped brand the village where it is located as 'land of sun', with all the accompanying iconography.

The analysis of attitudes towards powerlines is a natural extension of this work (and the authors have already several papers published on this issue - Devine-Wright 2013, Devine-Wright and Batel 2013, Cotton and Devine-Wright 2013), since grid connections are fundamental for achieving clean energy targets and pylons have a similar impact on landscape to those of wind turbines. They are 'unnatural' structures, towering above the fields and trees, increasing bird mortality and devaluing properties in their line of sight. Furthermore, high voltage powerlines tend to occupy a far greater extension than wind farms and raise other concerns, such as health impacts. Though the risks of non-ionising radiation from electromagnetic fields is still far from established, there is anecdotal evidence of the increase of childhood leukaemia cases near high-voltage powerlines that has triggered several protest movements (Draper et al. 2005). Additionally, Devine-Wright (2011) draws attention to the (negative) iconic value of electricity pylons: 'these images have a strong evaluative component; that is, they are highly positively or negatively regarded, are readily understood and easily communicated', enabling collective sense-making and social remembering (Devine-Wright 2011: 103).

This paper is also a good example of the importance of doing qualitative work in environmental psychology. Interviews and in particular focus groups give access to collective construction of meaning in a manner and depth that questionnaire surveys fail to achieve. Case studies rather than extensive analysis allow examining the interplay between attitudes and representations in the context of particular communities and locations. At the same time, the authors are able to explore the fit between representations of the local in particular and of the rural in general, moving between different scales.

Much of the authors findings are in line with previous work that shows how the representation of landscape as either natural or artificial/industrial influences acceptance of energy infrastructures, in particular wind turbines (see, for instance, van der Horst, 2007; Jobert et al., 2007; Cowell, 2010; Jolivet and Heiskanen 2010, Krauss 2010). Familiarity with these structures also breeds acceptance, as in the case of wind farms, which face far less resistance after their construction (Warren et al., 2005; Devine-Wright, 2005; Van der Horst, 2007). Conversely, idealised views of the rural that ignore the centuries of human intervention in the landscape tend to lead to less acceptance of the 'machines in the garden'.

The paper also explores differences in representations based on social characteristics, such as length of living in the locality and of viewing the rural as a place of production or as place of leisure. This highlights the fact that communities are not homogenous, that different representations and attitudes towards energy infrastructures coexist. Communities are made up of different kinds of people, from long-time residents to newcomers, from land owners to local authorities, from members of environmental conservation groups to business owners. Different kinds of people have different interests, concerns and values.

However, the paper has a few limitations. By focusing on representations of place, it does not deal with other reasons to reject high-voltage powerlines, such as environmental impacts, health concerns or fear of loss of property value. This particular powerline will connect a planned nuclear power plant to the grid, which might also be a driver for rejection. Nuclear energy is particularly stigmatised and anti-nuclear movements remain very strong. Economic benefits, such as income from renting the land crossed over by the powerline, may also affect the attitudes of residents. Moreover, focus groups results may have not been used to their full potential, since dialogue or disagreement among participants is not reported in the paper, thus the added value in comparison with individual interviews is not always clear. Opposing stances or concurrent arguments may have been highlighted if exchanges, rather than isolated statements, had been quoted.

Nevertheless, this paper potentially informs energy planning and policy. Taking into account resident's representations of place and assessing alternative pathways and

technical solutions (such as underground lines) may contribute to a more inclusive and consensual planning of these infrastructures.

Furthermore, the operationalisation of the concepts of place attachment, place identity and social representations of landscape is particularly useful for understanding other energy-related social movements. Portugal has witnessed in recent years a particularly strong opposition to offshore and onshore oil and gas prospection in the south and southwest coast of the country. Though climate and environmental concerns were paramount, arguments against fossil fuel exploration also focused on the risk of spoiling the pristine beauty of beaches and other seascapes that are the hallmark of the Algarve region. Though the movement brought together a wide array of organisations (including local authorities) and community members, in some cases it was spearheaded by foreign nationals that have taken up residence in the area due to its 'paradise-like' nature. The movement buttressed their claims by generating high-impact visual campaign tools, such as videos and pictures showing jet black oil spills besmirching the yellow sand and cliffs. These iconic images were disseminated worldwide, spurring international solidarity of environmental movements, and stressing the danger to the most valuable economic activity in the region, tourism. As a result, the government has cancelled the prospection contracts, acknowledging that this was not an 'acceptable location'. The same conceptual framework may thus be fruitfully applied to ongoing community protests against oil pipes in North Dakota (United States), tar sands in Canada, fracking in England and so on.

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