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Wind power, discourse coalitions and policy integration

The paper stems from an on-going research project sponsored by the British Academy on the development of wind power in Britain, Denmark and France. Wind power, as one of the most prominent forms of renewables, presents an important example of the need for policy integration, since the sector is at the cross-roads of energy policy, climate change policy, industrial policy and indeed economic policy. Because the actors involved speak a range of discourses drawn from these policy domains, some speak a common language and seek synthetic goals, whilst others stress one category of goals over another, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts.

Consequently, the paper considers the discourse coalitions that have developed in relation to wind power, and the ways in which rival coalitions enter into conflict and cause planning stalemate. International NGOs, particularly Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, central governments and energy companies now speak a common discourse stressing the role of renewables - and particularly wind - in fighting climate change and enabling the sustainability transition. Meanwhile national / regional nature conservation organisations are challenged by the need to balance immediate disruptions to rural environments against long term sustainability issues. Further, residents opposition groups have mushroomed as planning applications for wind farms have multiplied. Seeking to rebut charges of NIMBYism, their responses have tended to stress legal rights and civil society participation in planning decisions.

These developments have revealed limitations in current modes of policy integration, since the uptake of wind generated electricity has remained very limited in Britain and France, unlike Denmark where a favourable social consensus has developed over the long term. From an examination of the differing national contexts, the paper identifies different modes and levels of policy integration, and traces their impacts on policy implementation outcomes.