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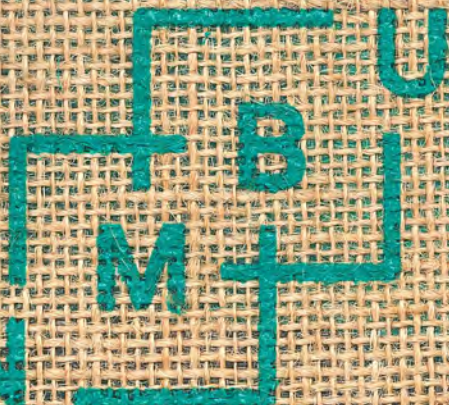
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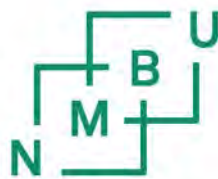
DEMOCRACY



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Contested Landscapes of Renewable Energies: Spatial Justice for Democratic Landscape

Viviana Ferrario

Università Iuav di Venezia

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As a contribution to the discussion about landscape democracy, I propose to observe some contested landscapes of renewable energy and the local protest against them to understand whether they can provide some information on what a democratic energy landscape should be. An analysis of the reasons behind the protest reveals that the landscape is not the object of the protest, but its tool: the landscape is used by protesters to understand, reveal and communicate a spatial injustice (Soja, 2010). It seems that the 'direct participation for all in all phases of decision making regarding landscape alteration, supervision of landscape evolution and prevention of reckless landscape destruction' (Prieur, 2006, p. 28) are requested not *per se*, but as a way to obtain spatial justice.

Contested Landscapes of Energy

Increasing awareness of peak oil and climate change in the last ten years, has influenced European societies to focus on the need to reduce the ecological impact of energy production in an attempt to comply with the Kyoto Protocol. European and national policies have provided strong backing for renewable energies. These policies are changing our landscape, creating what Selman convincingly called the 'Landscape of carbon-neutrality', namely the new 'type of landscape that might emerge as society finally grasps the nettle of dramatically reducing energy profligacy and dependence on fossil fuels' (Selman, 2010, p. 157).

Despite their apparent contribution to sustainability these new landscapes can be – and often are – contested, raising problems of social acceptance all over Europe (among others: Devine-Wright, 2005; Nadai, 2007; Wüstenhagen et al., 2007; Kerckow, 2007; Wolsink, 2007a; Zoellner et al., 2008; Selman, 2010). As previous researchers have noted (Wolsink, 2007b; Van der Horst, 2007), it is too simplistic to dismiss this phenomenon as a Not in My Backyard (NIMBY) syndrome. These struggles can provide important information on some inherent criticalities of present energy transition towards renewables, linked in particular to its spatial aspects. Renewables are generally small and geographically diffused and for that presented as more 'democratic' than other energy plants like huge hydro- or atomic power plants. Why then they are contested? How does the population deal with the changes produced by the new plants?

Biogas and Micro-Hydropower Unfair Landscapes

In this paper, I closely observed two contested new renewable energy landscapes – notably biogas and micro-hydropower – in the North East of Italy, where they provoked widespread protest in the last few years (Ferrario & Castiglioni, 2015; Ferrario & Reho, 2015). Apart from the classical NIMBY attitude of a few cases, what in general emerges is that local protests against renewables' development seems to be situated on two levels. At the first level, the renewable itself is questioned in principle both for environmental and social reasons (using crops to feed the digester means taking land and water away from food production and taking away the water from the minor rivers means micro-hydro ecosystems may be heavily damaged). At the second level, what is questioned is the local transformation, changing the local landscape. Studying the reasons behind the protest in more depth we discover that, at this second level, the unacceptability of new plants seems not to be influenced by their visual impact. Biogas and micro-hydropower do not generate extremely visible landscape transformation and protesters, in their discourses, rarely refer directly to landscape. Landscape is far from being simply one of the factors influencing the acceptance of renewable energy technologies. Landscape is not the object of the protest. Protesters use the landscape as a tool: to understand the problem, to provide documentary evidence of it and to stage the protest itself.

Protesters seem to think of the landscape 'as a regional polity' and so perceive the issues of justice and power embedded in the landscape itself (Olwig & Mitchell, 2007). The protesters' perceptions of renewable energy landscape seem, in fact, to be strongly influenced by processes lying 'beneath' the landscape. New biogas and hydropower landscapes are perceived not so much as ugly, nor only as environmentally impacting, but as spatially unjust: biogas plants generate heavy traffic in rural areas and impact the wellbeing of the population living nearby and hydropower production exploits mountain territories to supply industrial, metropolitan Perialpine plains. These renewable energy landscapes are not democratic (and therefore contested), because they are produced by a policy that is spatially unjust. This can explain why aesthetic issues are rarely raised in protests. This also explains why people are completely unsatisfied with 'mitigation', consisting of planting trees to hide the view of the plant from the road (defi-

ned by local people as a 'fig leaf strategy').

This research confirms that the perception of the new landscape is strongly influenced – according to Selman – by the 'narrative' behind it. Nevertheless this narrative is more than just rhetoric. On the contrary, it identifies a real problem: a global problem of sustainability, equity and fairness (Wolsink, 2007a) and a local problem of spatial justice.

Seeking a Fairer and More Democratic Energy Landscape

Landscapes are public in the sense of being places shared by different individuals and communities that matter to them in different ways. As such, they are open to particularly strong conflicts both as to what the future of a landscape ought to be and as to who is entitled to have a legitimate say in the decisions to be taken about it (O'Neill & Walsh, 2000). If we want successful, non-conflicting, development of renewables, we must provide:

- globally: an environmentally and socially friendly renewable energy production systems;
- locally: a spatially just strategy of development.

Coming directly to the second level, the one that deals with the landscape in this part of Italy today, public policies on renewables do not consider either the sum effect of various plants, nor the interaction between them, nor the impact of each project locally. They are indifferent towards territorial characters and landscape transformation. They do not respect procedural justice criteria (Zoellner et al., 2005).

As was highlighted, the characteristics of new renewable energy landscapes, in terms of location, number, speed and impact of transformation, are important factors influencing the conflict (Van der Horst, 2007), and renewable energy systems' acceptability are context dependent. It is not a question of mitigating such conflicts, but imagining a new spatially-sensible regional energy policy:

- Dimension, location and timing of plants are key elements: renewable energy development should be designed within the territory, respecting its character;
- Renewable energy development must be considered and managed not as a separate sectoral policy, but as part of spatial and landscape planning (Prados, 2010; Legambiente, 2011);
- Landscape should not be considered something to be protected from energy development, but to be designed with (Ghosn, 2010; De Waal and Stremke, 2014);

- The new landscape of carbon neutrality should be designed within a framework of procedural and spatial justice.

In this sense, in order to learn to 'love the landscape of carbon neutrality' we do not only need to update the old underlying narrative with the new issues arising after the Kyoto Protocol (Selman 2010), but we also need to build a spatially fairer, democratic, renewable energy system. If this happened, then the new landscape of carbon neutrality would be accepted, because it would represent a fairer and more democratic process. Only this way the new democratic energy landscape would really be 'the spatial meaning of democracy'.

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Constitutional ideals of democracy, human rights, equality and freedom have a tangible landscape dimension. Democracy as an ideal is rooted in free debate in public space; landscape is the spatial materialisation of democracy. At this time of global environmental and economic challenges driving increasing social tensions, there is urgent need in on-going discussion about the role of landscape in society and providing the relevant insights and knowledge required to address such situations.

The very concept of landscape – in policy as well as in academic disciplines – is changing from predominantly the understanding of landscape as a visual phenomenon (scenery) to wider conceptions of a complex living space/environment that is moulded by material and intangible systems and components.

Underpinning Landscape in the European Landscape Convention's definition of "an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors" are the Council of Europe's aspirational core values for Democracy, Human Rights and Social Justice. The conviction is that the quality of landscape as a living space, whether urban or rural, is vital in securing the basic human right to material and socio-cultural wellbeing.

In the last decade the landscape convention has driven production of a rich body of knowledge on the multiple, complex aspects of landscape and ways in which the convention might be implemented. Yet, there is a need for more discourse and knowledge on landscape as the spatial meaning of democracy, and on democratic values' role in protecting, managing and planning of landscapes.

The Centre for Landscape Democracy (CLaD) is a cross-disciplinary international centre for the creation and dissemination of scientific knowledge, creative interpretations and innovative solutions within the theme of Landscape Democracy. The centre was established in 2014 and is hosted by the Department of Landscape Architecture and Spatial Planning (ILP) at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences.

Objectives:

- to promote national and international critical discourse on the relationship between landscape and democratic society;
- to explore and examine the linkages between human rights, landscape, democracy and public policy interventions (legislation, policy and planning and design practice);
- to produce and collate theoretical, methodological and applied knowledge on landscape democracy from a variety of disciplines and policy perspectives.



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