

Project Progress Report: January 2004

Programme Name :Environment and Human Behaviour

Project Title :Tilting at Windmills? The Attitude-Behaviour Gap in Renewable Energy Conflicts

Award No : RES-221-25-0015

Award Holder(s) : Professor John F. Benson

Period of Report : 01.04.2003 to 31.12.2003

Institution(s) : University of Newcastle

Total ESRC Award : £40,593

Total co-funding of Award from outside the ESRC (do not include HEFCE or University contributions) : none

Aims and Methods of Research

The aim of the project is to bring together a range of disciplines to address the apparent gap between human attitudes and behaviours in renewable energy conflicts; while there is high public support for renewable energy (including wind power), there is often very strong public opposition to individual windfarm developments leading to low success in permitting decisions. The project will unpack this apparent gap using theories, concepts and existing research from a range of disciplines, including economics, environmental management, geography, planning, politics, psychology and sociology. The aims are:

- (i) to synthesise current understanding from different disciplinary perspectives of the human attitudes and behaviours exemplified by wind energy controversies
- (ii) to begin to develop new theoretical and conceptual tools to extend that understanding
- (iii) to devise new research questions and new methodologies that involve novel links between previously unconnected or loosely connected disciplines
- (iv) to begin to inform public policy on these issues.

The methods used in this research include disciplinary research reviews drawing on theories and published studies; analyses of published grey literature and web-based materials; and interactive participant workshops. These involve the multi-disciplinary team of participants reviewing and dissecting the human attitudinal and behavioural issues embedded in the windfarm issue, mapping out a preliminary understanding of the issue from their own disciplinary perspective, and developing new avenues for research.

The intended outcomes of the project include the development of new theoretical and conceptual tools to extend current understanding of environment-behaviour relationships, with an emphasis on cross-disciplinary synergies; to devise new research questions and new methodologies that involve novel links between previously unconnected or loosely connected disciplines; and to contribute to the development of public policy in relation to renewable energy in general, wind energy in particular, and to the procedures and processes through which project permitting occurs.

Confirmation Statement

It is confirmed that this research is being carried out as anticipated in the initial contract with the ESRC. This stated that the representatives from the different disciplines would be brought together, and their insights elicited and drawn on. This would take place in a number of inter-disciplinary workshops. Three of these have already been held, and the fourth is being held in February 2004. As stated, common data sources have been collected and distributed to partners, directed literature reviews for partners have been carried out, a general literature review of the area has been completed, and discourse analysis of some of the material produced is also taking place.

Highlights of the Research and Important Findings

The project is progressing well, and has already developed a number of fascinating insights and indications for further research. The project has not been designed to generate 'findings' per se, but to explore the possibilities for developing interdisciplinary research. The work so far on the project has certainly highlighted a number of key ways in which this may take place.

Firstly, a number of theoretical links between different disciplines have been identified which may form the basis for such developments. For example, social constructionist ideas have been identified as common to a number of subject areas, as have other meta theories. As well as the common use of theoretical perspectives, a number of interconnected issues and themes have arisen from across different disciplines. These have included:

- Considering the nature of the planning system, and the importance of understanding how this affects the decisions that are made and the formation of opposition
- Addressing the concept of 'knowledge'; where it comes from, how it is used, and why.
- The need to unpack and understand what is meant by 'opposition'.
- Considering the importance of place, landscape value, and local social and historical context

How these common themes and ideas that have arisen from different disciplines might be addressed by new cross-disciplinary research has also formed part of the work of the project.

The first way this has been considered is for theoretical positions from one discipline to be examined by using methods from another. For example, the emphasis in geography on the way that people understand and treat information in different ways in defining 'problems' could be examined by a discursive psychology approach.

Secondly, it may also be possible to link different methods together, and develop methodological triangulation. This might take the form of findings from one dataset enhancing understanding of another, such as a range of survey results contextualised by greater depth in interviews and ethnography. It could also for example be through the framework of economic models being developed by data or concepts from other disciplines. Factors and variables could be built into the model, and research from other disciplines, such as sociology or social psychology, could suggest what these variables might be.

Finally, the work of the project has also included a (re)consideration of the nature and very existence of a 'gap' between attitudes and behaviour. Is it useful to think of a gap between public endorsement of wind energy and unsuccessful project implementation? Is the gap in terms of individual beliefs and actions, or in terms of a vocal minority imposing their will on the decision making process? It has been highlighted that any one behavioural act may be governed by a large number of factors, so there

may only be a weak relationship between attitude and any particular behaviour. Another way of considering the gap is to take account of the 'time factor', which could explain the differences between attitudes and behaviour. It might be that there is a time lag between the different stages of development and attitudes towards windfarms. Attitudes change over time but changes in behaviour occur later than an expression of attitudes. These issues will be further considered during the remainder of the project.

The work so far in this project has highlighted the benefit of designing research that takes into account the theoretical and methodological insights from other disciplines. This may be in terms of asking new questions, benefiting from different theoretical understandings, or enhancing data collection. This is not to underestimate the difficulties in doing so, and the remainder of this project will be focused on developing frameworks for interdisciplinary research that may be useful in this topic area and others.

Changes to Original Award

No changes have been made.

Research Staff:

Claire Haggett , Research Assistant 1 April 2003 – 31 March 2004

Project partners:

1. Chris Armitage, Lecturer, Psychology, University of Sheffield.
2. Derek Bell, Leverhulme Fellow, Politics, University of Newcastle
3. Sue Chilton, Lecturer, Economics, University of Newcastle.
4. Hugh Clear Hill, Senior Lecturer, Environment, University of Sunderland.
5. Tim Gray, Professor, Politics, University of Newcastle.
6. Robert Macfarlane, Senior Lecturer, Geography & Environmental Management, Northumbria University.
7. Hugh Metcalf, Lecturer, Economics, University of Newcastle.
8. Suzanne Moffatt, Lecturer, Population & Health Sciences, University of Newcastle.
9. Neil Powe, Lecturer (Planning and Environmental Economics), Architecture, Planning & Landscape, University of Newcastle.
10. John Smith, Reader, Psychology, University of Sunderland.
11. Chris Spencer, Reader, Psychology, University of Sheffield.
12. Geoff Vigar, Lecturer (Planning), Architecture, Planning & Landscape, University of Newcastle University

Publications

Publications in preparation:

Bell, D., Grey, T., and Haggett, C. 'Policy, Participation and the 'Social Gap' in Windfarm Siting Decisions' intended for Ethics, Environment and Place

Bell, D., Grey, T., and Haggett, C. 'Windfarm Siting – the Case of Offshore Windfarms'

Benson, J.F., and Haggett, C. 'Offshore windfarms – are they the solution to siting onshore?'

Haggett, C. and Smith, J.L 'Tilting at windmills? Using discourse analysis to understand the attitude-behaviour gap in renewable energy conflicts' paper to be given at the British Sociological Association Conference to be held in York, March 28th 2004

A number of working papers have also been written by partners for the project:

Armitage, C. and Spencer, C. (2003) 'The Attitude-Behaviour Gap in Renewable Energy Conflicts as seen from social and environmental psychology' Project working paper

Bell, D. and Gray, T. (2003) 'Policy, Participation, and the 'Social Gap' in Windfarm Siting Decisions' Project working paper

Chilton, S. and Metcalf, H. (2003) 'An Economic View of the 'Attitude-Behaviour' Gap with Respect to the Siting of Windfarms' Project working paper

Clear Hill, H. (2003a) 'Planning Principles and Procedures' Presentation made at project workshop, University of Newcastle, 2nd June 2003

Clear Hill, H. (2003b) 'Cross National Comparisons' Presentation made at project workshop, University of Newcastle 18th September 2003

Haggett, C and Benson, J. F. (2003). *The Attitude-Behaviour Gap in Renewable Energy Conflicts: A Theoretical and Methodological Review*. ESRC Environment & Human Behaviour New Opportunities Programme, Second Workshop, Policy Studies Institute, London, 9-10 December 2003

Haggett, C. (2003a) 'Tilting at Windmills? The Attitude Behaviour Gap in Renewable Energy Conflicts: Literature Review' Project working paper

Haggett, C. (2003b) 'Offshore Wind: A Brief Review of the Literature' Project Working Paper

MacFarlane, R. (2003) 'Information in Planning and Opposition: a case study in renewable energy' Project working paper

Moffatt, S. and Haggett, C. (2003) 'A Sociological Approach to Questions about Siting and Living with Windmills' Project working paper.

Powe, N. (2003) 'Public Preferences for Windfarm Development: a Willingness to Pay Approach' Project working paper

Smith, J. L. and Haggett, C. (2003) 'Exploring the Attitude-Behaviour Gap from a Discursive Standpoint' Project working paper

Vigar, G. (2003) 'Researching Wind Energy Developments: Perspectives from Planning Theory' Project working paper

Engagement with potential research Users (outside the academic community)

One of the aims of the project is to begin to inform public policy on the issues surrounding siting conflicts. The findings will have implications and applications beyond the specific issue of wind energy and will also inform public policy on the degree to which policy can or should attempt to

provide information, change attitudes, change behaviours, change policies and procedures or change incentives.

The organisation of the third project workshop, to which representatives of key interested groups in the wind energy debate were invited, has led to a number of key contacts being made and potential users of the research being identified. Inviting representatives to the workshop meant informing them about the project, and a number of planners and councillors from all over the North East have expressed interest in the project and in being kept informed of its progress and results. Members of wind energy companies and opposition groups have also requested to be kept informed of our project, and it has become apparent that the issues that are being engaged with in this project are key for stakeholders and groups who are involved in planning, government, or siting decisions.

Contribution to Programme

In many ways, this project differs from some of the others in the Programme. Our project might almost be seen as a microcosm of the Programme, as what we are attempting to do is bring together different disciplinary, and therefore different theoretical and methodological, ideas and perspectives, and draw out and develop the commonalities and differences between them.

However, this project is contributing to the Programme in terms of the two key questions which the Programme is focused on. These are:

- What are the implications of your research findings for human behaviour?
- What new areas of research and inquiry do your findings suggest?

This project is geared more towards the second than the first question. It is reviewing the different approaches, theories and research that exist from a range of disciplines; drawing out commonalities between them; and developing informed research directions and designs based on these. A number of steps towards this have already been taken. So far, theoretical links that may be made between disciplines and meta theories that they may have in common have been highlighted. A number of key themes have been similarly raised across the different disciplines, leading to the development of interdisciplinary work. In terms of our findings in relation to human behaviour, it is clear from the work so far that the issues are extremely complex, with a number of variables and elements and issues to take into consideration.

From attendance at Programme workshops, links between this project and others in the Programme have also become apparent. These have concerned such things as the importance of the role of key individuals, and the critical need to understand the context in which the issues are played out; the importance of institutions, and their regulation of patterns of behaviour; the strategic use of knowledge; and considering the nature of a 'gap' between beliefs and actions. Further consideration and development of these common ideas is anticipated.

Detailed Progress

(i) The project is going well. A comprehensive literature review has been carried out (and continues) on the factors that may influence conflicts around renewable energy siting. This was focused on whether such opposition is best understood in terms of deficiencies in the regulatory and planning system, or in terms of unfavourable public attitudes. In terms of the public, a number of theories of attitudes and behaviour have been considered, most notably that of 'nimbyism', which is surprisingly widely used still. However, evidence from several empirical studies has cast doubt on this as an explanation for opposition, and cross national comparisons can be used to highlight the complexity of the issues and the necessary focus on the interaction between people and planning; this may be in

terms of such things as communication, involvement, and ownership. The database is available to project participants on the project website which has been set up to facilitate communication.

Three workshops for members of the project have been held. The first of these set the scene, brought all members up to speed with the relevant aspects of the UK planning system, the development of windfarms and the wider energy context. It was also an opportunity for members to begin to highlight areas of theory and concepts from their disciplines that are relevant to the research questions.

The second workshop consisted of presentations by participants of working papers on their initial approach to the questions that have been posed. These papers were circulated amongst group members and after presentations they formed the basis for some very fruitful discussions, with a number of commonalities and potential areas for overlap, synergy and collaboration being identified. In the Third Workshop, representatives from groups with an interest in windfarm sitings were invited to offer their perspectives on the issues. The data from this are being used to generate interdisciplinary methodologies.

The proceedings of each workshop have been recorded and transcribed and may offer an opportunity for a modest "discourse analysis" of the project itself. The working papers are at different stages of development, but will in due course contribute to the outputs of the project and may lead to more formal publication.

(ii) This is the first project report.

(iii) There have been no difficulties encountered e.g. in staffing, access, data analysis

(iv) No changes have been introduced or are envisaged in the research objectives or methodology

(v) In terms of the development of the research and estimating how far the original timetable will be met, no difficulties are anticipated. It should be noted however that there has been a small change to the original timetable for the grant. This was originally from 1st March 2003 to 29th February 2004. It is actually 1st April 2003 to 31st March 2004.

The next steps for the project are:

- having identified areas of mutual interest and where a joint approach might be of methodological benefit, to develop in more detail interdisciplinary ideas.
- to consider in more depth the issue of terminology
- to take into account cross-national comparisons in understanding how and why attitudes towards wind energy differ
- to ensure that research is inter-disciplinary, and not just multi-disciplinary.

A fourth workshop will be held in February 2004 to develop further the interdisciplinary approaches, and a final workshop will conclude the project and finalise plans for dissemination of the findings. A number of inter-disciplinary papers for refereed journals are already being planned and/or written, including the possibility of an edited book.