

# A three-dimensional view of public participation in Scottish land-use planning: Empowerment or social control?

Planning Theory

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## Abstract

Current planning policies place significant emphasis on the importance of public participation. Through a case study of a planning application for a wind power development in Scotland, this article examines the realities of such policy commitments. It seeks to evaluate to what extent the planning process represents an exercise in participation – entailing empowerment of participants – or rather in social control – through which public participation is managed in order to secure particular outcomes. The article refers to Lukes's (1974 [2004]) three-dimensional view of power to demonstrate the various forms of power present within the planning system. Subtle forms of power are shown to act to restrict the extent to which public participants meaningfully influence decisions. This is considered to be particularly true where public participation leads to the expression of public opposition towards developments which are explicitly supported by government policies (as is the case with renewable energy). However, while power remains predominantly in the hands of decision-makers, and within the structures of the planning system, public participants are not powerless. Yet, greater power exists within and beyond the planning system influencing participants' perceptions of what constitutes legitimate participation. The active roles of participants in interpreting what is expected or required of them, and presenting themselves in ways perceived to lead to optimal benefits must be acknowledged. Engaging with the opinions and knowledge of members of the public is more problematic than simply setting up encounters or opportunities. Rather it requires a more fundamental change in the ways by which expert and lay knowledges are perceived within society.

## Keywords

participation, power, renewable energy

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## Introduction

Current Scottish planning policies (as well as those of the rest of the UK) place significant emphasis on the importance of public participation. For example, it is stated that:

Everyone must have real opportunities to take part in the planning and decision-making that will influence their future. (Scottish Planning Policy 1 [SPP1])

And that:

The Scottish Ministers attach considerable importance to public participation in the planning process. (SPP6)

This can be seen to reflect a broader shift towards greater commitments to public participation within a wide range of environmental or science-related policies (Irwin, 2006). The underlying presumption appears to be that greater public participation in decision-making processes will lead to more socially acceptable (Chilvers, 2008; Gregory and Miller, 1998), and hence sustainable outcomes. However, projects or decision-making processes which make claims to being participatory do not necessarily accurately reflect public interests and participants do not necessarily play influential roles. Supposedly 'participatory' approaches can conceal undemocratic or unjust processes (see Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

This article presents the findings of a case study of a planning application for a wind power development in rural Scotland, and seeks to evaluate to what extent the planning process represents an exercise in participation – entailing empowerment of participants – or rather in social control – through which public participation is managed in order to secure particular outcomes. It is suggested that, although planning processes are described as open and participatory, members of the public's influence is highly restricted. Tension exists between commitments to public participation and desires to control decision-making processes (and outcomes). As will be shown below, a complex mix of forms of power are exercised in various ways and reflected not only in the outcomes of planning applications but also in the processes and structures of the planning system.

## Public participation in planning

Within the planning theory literature public participation is a much-debated topic. Advocates of participatory planning have argued that: 'From our modernist reliance on state-directed futures and top-down processes, we have to move to more community-based planning, from the ground up, geared to *community empowerment*' (Sandercock, 1998: 30). Incorporating the views of members of the public into planning decisions is seen to give greater legitimacy to those decisions, and it has been acknowledged that from the mid-1990s onwards politicians and policy-makers have come to make frequent use (and misuse) of the term 'collaborative planning' (Healey, 2003). Kaza (2006: 256) contends that: 'The participatory approach in the public planning domain has become institutionalized as a method of good planning practice' and that 'democratic principles

and public participation have become increasingly accepted as means for balancing and rationalizing multiple interests and preferences'. Rydin (2007: 54) asserts that within planning theory the 'new orthodoxy clusters around the idea that the core of planning should be an engagement with a range of stakeholders, giving them voice and seeking to achieve planning consensus'.

However, participatory approaches are not free of criticism. Particular concerns have been raised about the emphasis which is placed on process, it has been suggested that 'the focus on interaction directs attention away from the justice and sustainability of the material outcomes of planning interventions' (Healey, 2003: 110). An important area of consideration is *who* participates, and equally who does *not* participate, critical attention must be paid to which voices dominate participatory processes (Hillier, 2000; Kaza, 2006). Within local contexts there can be many conflicting interests (Kaza, 2006) and existing relationships of power play critical roles (Healey, 2003). Thus, participatory approaches to planning are fraught with difficulties and challenges. 'Democratic planning, then, must reconcile a complex of precepts which are desirable, but which pull in different directions' (March, 2004: 412). Ultimately, 'an inclusionary collaborative process does not necessarily guarantee the justice of either process or material outcomes' (Healey, 2003: 115).

### Scottish planning policy

Within Scotland planning is a devolved matter, meaning that Scotland has its own planning system and planning policies separate to those of the rest of the UK. In recent years, the Scottish planning system has undergone review and this review highlighted the increasing salience of public participation. The draft planning advice note (PAN) entitled 'Community Engagement "Planning with People"' released in July 2006 by the Scottish Executive asserted that: 'Scottish Ministers are determined to make the planning system more inclusive and accessible to people, with greater openness and accountability in the decision-making process' (Scottish Executive, 2006). Subsequently, a new planning bill came into force in the spring of 2007 in response to a professed need to modernize the Scottish planning system. Within this new planning bill four of the principal goals were: strengthening the involvement of communities; speeding up decisions; reflecting local views better; and, allowing quicker investment decisions (Scottish Executive, 2005). Such goals are not entirely complementary. In particular, 'speeding up' the planning process appears somewhat at odds with the desire to 'strengthen the involvement of communities' and 'reflect views better' both of which imply greater local involvement and participation in decision-making processes and which might therefore be expected to necessitate a longer and more deliberative process. There is some resonance here with Irwin's (2006) observation that within science policies 'typically, one part of a document adopts the language of re-building trust while another is committed to an established economic and technical agenda' (Irwin, 2006: 309). Where potentially conflicting commitments are made it may be likely that they will lead to trade-offs when policies are translated into action, as such it is at this point that the true commitments become visible.

While public participation is described as highly important and valuable within Scottish planning policies, the role which members of the public play may be limited.

This is particularly well illustrated in the case of planning for renewable energy developments. Within the UK – and Scotland in particular – there are important targets as to the amount of electricity which must come from renewable sources (for example, wind, solar or hydro power). Currently, in Scotland the target is that 50 percent of Scottish electricity should be supplied from renewable sources by 2020 (Scottish Government, 2009). The Scottish planning system has adapted to reflect such commitments and particular planning policies have been created relating specifically to planning for renewable energy developments. *Scottish Planning Policy Six: Renewable Energy* (SPP6) sets out a planning framework which aims to ‘help ensure the delivery of renewable energy targets as well as supporting the development of a viable renewables industry in Scotland’. It is said that ‘the planning system should manage the process of encouraging, approving and implementing renewable energy proposals’ and that: ‘Planning authorities should use the development plan process to support and encourage the continued growth of all renewable technologies’ (SPP6). Thus, in response to national targets for the development of renewable energy capacity the planning system has developed an explicit bias in favour of particular types of development (i.e. renewable energy projects).

This has implications for the role of public participation relating to renewable energy planning applications, particularly in cases where public participation leads to the expression of public opposition towards proposed developments. Such instances provide illustrations of (implicit and at times explicit) trade-offs between policy commitments for public participation and modernist conceptions of development underpinning the planning system. Through examining the realities and implications of public participation within planning processes clearer impressions of the motivations behind policy commitments to participation are enabled. This article examines to what extent public participation serves substantive goals of incorporating multiple viewpoints and accurately reflecting public interests or rather instrumental goals of legitimizing decisions which have already been taken.

In SPP6 it is suggested that local objections to a planning application should present an opportunity for developers to address concerns and to modify their plans accordingly:

Where valid concerns have been raised as part of the planning process, the applicant will need to demonstrate how these can be overcome or how any detrimental environmental effects can be minimised, where appropriate advancing any material arguments which might outweigh objections to the proposed development. (SPP6: 14)

The bias in favour of renewable energy developments is apparent: it is anticipated that objections can be overcome or outweighed by benefits. Public participation – while emphasized in planning policies – is not considered a key determining factor for planning decisions. This is true not just in the case of planning for renewable energy developments; *Scottish Planning Policy One* (SPP1) states that: ‘Opposition to a proposal is not in itself a ground for refusing planning permission. The weight given to public concern as a material consideration should be based on the relevance of the planning issues raised’ (p. 19). While on the one hand creating boundaries relating to ‘relevant’ evidence may be considered necessary in order to reach efficient planning decisions, attention

ought to be paid to how and by whom ‘relevance’ is interpreted. SPP1 also sets out some examples of the range of possible considerations which might be taken into consideration when determining a particular planning application. These are:

- Scottish Executive policy, and UK Government policy on reserved matters;
- National Planning Policy Guidelines, Scottish Planning Policies, Planning Advice Notes and Circulars;
- European policy, where relevant;
- a draft structure or local plan;
- a National Park Plan;
- Area Waste Plans;
- Community plans;
- the environmental impact of the proposal;
- the design of the proposed development and its relationship to its surroundings;
- access, provision of infrastructure and planning history of the site;
- views of statutory and other consultees; and
- legitimate public concern or support expressed on relevant planning matters. (SPP1: 17)

Great weight is attached to policy (Scottish, UK and European), technical assessments (including, for example, environmental impact assessments), and the views of experts (i.e. statutory consultees). Public concern/support is, perhaps significantly, last on this list, and even then it is qualified as being *legitimate* public concern or support and only that expressed on *relevant* planning matters. Importantly, which aspects of public concern are considered ‘legitimate’ and which planning matters are considered ‘relevant’ are determined by decision-makers. Therefore, considerable power rests with the decision-maker and his/her subjective judgement.

This reflects an important criticism of participatory techniques. While they are advocated as means of replacing top-down decision-making with more people-centred processes which should empower participants, all too often power, in fact, remains with the individuals or organizations setting up the process. These individuals/organizations define the terms and methodology of the process and in doing so retain an enormous amount of power, and simultaneously restrict the power of participants.

Project actors are not passive facilitators of local knowledge production and planning. They shape and direct these processes. At the most basic level, project staff ‘own’ the research tools, choose the topics, record the information, and abstract and summarize according to project criteria of relevance. (Mosse, 2001: 19)

They ultimately determine which information is gathered and how it is used or analysed, and thus they are able to shape not only the process but also the outcome (Kothari, 2001). In such a case, participation serves a cosmetic purpose of legitimizing projects and decisions which have already been decided, participants then ‘become a ghostly presence within the planning process – visible, heard even, but ultimately only there because their involvement lends credibility and legitimacy to decisions that have already been made’ (Hildyard et al., 2001: 59).

While public participation is described as being of great importance within planning policies one must question how meaningful or influential such participation in fact is – particularly in instances where public participation leads to vocal opposition towards projects which reflect national policy goals. In such cases restricting or controlling public participation might be a means of social control to ensure ‘desirable’ outcomes. A central focus therefore is power: who possesses it and how is it exercised within participatory processes? Retaining the authority to shape planning processes and determine which forms of participation are ‘legitimate’ or ‘relevant’ gives decision-makers considerable power to control both planning processes and outcomes, and this is directly counter to the notion of participation.

## Power

Participatory approaches have typically been ‘justified in terms of sustainability, relevance and empowerment’ (Cooke and Kothari, 2001: 5). As such, meaningful participation requires empowerment of participants and thus any evaluation of participatory activities must consider where power is found and how this is deployed. There is a vast array of different theories which attempt to define or explore the concept of power. This article cannot possibly consider all the relevant literature on this topic; instead some key theories will be briefly discussed in order to set out how the concept is understood in this research.

First, Dahl (1961) conceives power to be present where A gets B to do something which B would not otherwise do. Thus, power is visible in overt conflicts and decision-making arenas and can only be identified through ‘careful examination of a series of concrete decisions’ (Dahl, 1958: 466). Dahl’s theory provides an example of what Lukes (1974 [2004]) described as the *one-dimensional view of power*. This view is essentially concerned with power as it is exercised in formal institutions and made visible through overt conflicts and decision-making outcomes.

Bachrach and Baratz (1970) built on and critiqued the work of Dahl (and other pluralists). They argued that the pluralists’ view of power ‘unduly emphasizes the importance of initiating, deciding and vetoing’ (Bachrach and Baratz, 1970: 6). They acknowledged that not only does A exercise power over B when A makes B do something that they would not otherwise do, but A can also exert power over B through institutional means. Such means limit the scope of political processes and hence can be used to achieve aims which are in the interests of A. Bachrach and Baratz’s theory fits what Lukes refers to as the *two-dimensional view of power*. This recognizes the role of power in formal decision-making, but also within informal settings and in less visible activities such as agenda-setting. Conflict according to this view can be covert as well as overt, but importantly conflict remains a crucial element in the exercise of power.

Lukes (1974 [2004]) critiques both the one- and two-dimensional views, in particular he contends that neither conflict (whether overt or covert) or decision-making (and non-decision-making) are necessary for power to be exercised. He therefore proposed a *three-dimensional view of power* which took into consideration not only how power is exercised within conflicts but also the role of power to prevent conflicts through shaping people’s interests and beliefs: ‘To put the matter sharply, A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him

by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants' (Lukes, 1974 [2004]: 27). In this way neither decisions nor conflict are required in order for power to have been exercised. According to the three-dimensional view, power is exercised in many ways which are not easily observed – even to those upon whom power is exercised.

Lukes's three-dimensional view of power is not without its criticisms (see for example, Hayward, 2006; Morriss, 2002; Shapiro, 2006). In particular, it has been contended that 'his posited third face of power defie[s] the possibility of scientific evaluation on the grounds that it depend[s] on unobservable real interests' (Shapiro, 2006: 146). The practical value of Lukes's theory has been questioned given that the three-dimensional view is seeking to observe something which is by definition covert or unobservable. Furthermore, critics have questioned whether it is ever possible to identify what an individual or group's 'real interests' are. Since its inception Lukes's theory has been substantially critiqued and developed but there have been few empirical studies conducted to test its practical value (however, one strong example is Gaventa [1980] who examined power relations in a Central Appalachian mining community). Therefore, Shapiro (2006) has called for further empirical work to be done to test the limits or relevance of the three-dimensional view of power. This research therefore represents a valuable opportunity to demonstrate the relevance and value of Lukes's theory.

The research does not attempt to identify or define any individual or group's 'real interests' and does not claim to be able to observe all forms of power which may be exercised (overtly or covertly). Rather, through exploring some of the forms of power which are exercised in the case study presented below, the research highlights the value of Lukes's theory and its strength as a framework for illustrating the many forms of power which may be at play within participatory processes. Importantly, the research is not centrally concerned with attributing power to particular individuals or groups or characterizing particular actors as powerful or powerless but rather it aims to illustrate the effects of power exercised at many levels and in many ways through participatory processes. At times, it is not always clear when or by whom power is exercised but it is possible to identify ways in which planning processes, outcomes and public participation have been shaped, influenced and altered through the exercise of power.

## Case study

The case study presented in this article examines a planning application to construct a wind farm in a rural area of central Scotland. The planning application was originally to be determined by the local authority; however, it was refused, bringing about an appeal by the developers meaning that the application was eventually determined through a public inquiry. The history of the planning application is discussed in more detail in Aitken (2009).

The prospective developers were one of the largest energy companies in the UK. The proposed development consisted of 16 turbines and ancillary works with the total capacity of the wind farm being 32 mega watts (MW). The selected site was situated between two small towns with the largest being seven miles away and having a population of 1700; the smaller of the towns was located approximately three miles away. The site where the wind farm was to be located was predominantly used for grazing sheep. Once

constructed, the wind farm would cover an area of around 450 hectares, and the individual turbines would be 67 metres tall with blade diameters of 80 metres (thus, having a total height of 107 metres). The development also required access roads, an anemometer mast to monitor wind speeds and a control building with electricity substation. The wind farm would have an operational life of 25 years after which time it would be decommissioned.

The planning application was formally lodged in 2003 (three years after the site was originally identified), and negative community feeling had already formed by this point. Once the application was lodged a local campaign group organized to oppose the proposed development. The group disseminated leaflets and prepared proforma objection letters to facilitate representations to the council (for a discussion of these letters, see Aitken et al., 2008). The result was that the council received an unprecedented number of objection letters.

Within Scotland planning applications for renewable energy developments with a total capacity of less than 50 MW are decided by local authorities, whereas those above this limit (and hydro power projects above 1 MW) are decided by ministers within the Scottish Government. As such in this case the planning application was originally due to be determined by the local authority. This was initially due to take place at a meeting in August 2004, however, a decision was deferred until January 2005. At this later meeting the council then voted to refuse the planning application. An appeal was lodged some six months after this and took place by means of a public inquiry. At the inquiry a reporter from the Scottish Executive Inquiry Report Unit (SEIRU) (now renamed as the Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals [DPEA]) was appointed to oversee and adjudicate the proceedings and evidence. The final outcome was that the appeal was upheld meaning that planning permission was granted. In total (from identification of the site to eventual granting of planning permission) the process took six years.

## Methods

The particular proposed development was selected since it presented an opportunity to examine a planning application within both local and centralized (i.e. SEIRU-led) planning contexts. Additionally, given the significant public opposition to the planning application it enabled evaluation of public participation in an instance where this took the form of public opposition to a development reflecting national policy preferences (i.e. in relation to renewable energy).

The case study was conducted in several stages. The initial stages involved a review of secondary material (press coverage, planners' reports, etc.) and a thematic analysis of objection letters. The thematic analysis of objection letters examined arguments made in objection letters written to the local council; it also considered the different forms that these objection letters took (see Aitken et al., 2008).

The next stage was a period of observation at the public inquiry. During this stage data were collected both from the evidence and cross-examination which played a significant part in the public inquiry process, and also through observations of, and conversations with, local community members attending the inquiry, and additionally with representatives of the developers and numerous 'expert' witnesses.



The penultimate stage was a thematic analysis of the eventual inquiry report (in which the outcome of the appeal was announced). This was conducted in order to evaluate how the decision-maker's rationale and perspective compared with that of the objectors and developers (Aitken et al., 2008). Finally, a series of semi-structured interviews was conducted. The analysis of the data collected through the review of secondary material, thematic analysis of objection letters and observation at the inquiry informed the selection of interviewees and also the design of the interviews. Interviewees were both in favour of, and in opposition to, the proposal, and had both professional and personal interests.

### **A one-dimensional view of the case**

Considering the case study according to what Lukes's set out as the one-dimensional view of power would involve looking simply at decision outcomes. According to this view, it would appear that objectors were powerful in the initial planning application stage (when the decision-making power rested with local authority representatives). During this stage local community members were frustrated by the planning process and expressed very vocally their discontent with the local authority which was seen to have mishandled the planning application (see Aitken, 2009). However, community members were influential. There were no formal objections from statutory consultees, and the council had stated that it was 'minded to approve' the application, thus the local opposition campaign group appear to have played a key role in influencing the decision to refuse planning permission for the proposed development.

However, the result of this outcome was that the developers appealed the planning decision, bringing about a public inquiry. Ultimately, the outcome of the public inquiry was to uphold the appeal, granting planning permission for the development. According to the one-dimensional view of power, objectors were not therefore powerful in this stage. Instead it was the developers' interests which were reflected in the outcome of the public inquiry and as such it is them who may be considered to have been powerful actors in this stage. Moreover, it might be argued that it was the Scottish Government whose interests were reflected in the appeal decision since it is government policy that promotes the development of renewable energy. Viewed in this way critical attention is called to the 'impartial' role of inquiry decision-makers (who are appointed by Scottish Government ministers).

### **A two-dimensional view of the case**

Examining the case through a two-dimensional view of power presents a more complex situation. For example, in the initial stages of the planning application objectors played crucial roles in shaping the ways in which the application was debated. This is most clear through considering the role played by the opposition group's creation of proforma objection letters. The local council received an unprecedented number of objection letters relating to the planning application (700 letters in total). Of these, 536 were proforma cards, 51 were proforma letters and the remaining 125 were individual letters. The proforma cards were created by the local opposition group and contained a list of

objections which individuals could tick and also invited objectors to write additional comments. The proforma letters were copies of one letter which had been circulated and sent to the council with multiple signatures. The individual letters were unique and written by individuals or families (although they frequently raised similar issues). Through an analysis of these letters it became evident that the different forms of letters structured objections in different ways. For example, it was found that:

From reviewing individual objection letters, it appears that initially the key concerns of opponents to the proposed development related to its visual presence and other aspects associated with the physical erection of the turbines. However, objections which were more organised (i.e. those expressed through proforma cards) focused predominantly on more tangible, less subjective potential negative impacts, i.e. that endangered species of birds may be negatively affected either through collision with turbines or damage and/or disturbance to their habitats. (Aitken et al. 2008: 787)

Since the vast majority of the objection letters (77%) were proforma cards these had significant effects on which issues or concerns became central within planning debates. In particular, it is clear that, in creating the proforma card, the opposition group prioritized objection issues and arguments which were perceived to have greater objectivity and to be considered more legitimate in planning debates. In this way it can be argued that the opposition group exercised ‘agenda-setting power’ and were influential in shaping not only the outcome but also the planning process within the initial planning application phase.

To a certain extent it can be argued that the opposition group also exercised agenda-setting power in the later public inquiry since they were able to raise topics to be discussed within the inquiry. Indeed, during interviews supporters of the proposed development complained that the opposition group had caused the inquiry to consider many irrelevant or unnecessary topics. However, an examination of institutional forms of power – including the power to set the agenda – leads more easily to the conclusion that power rested predominantly within the structures and organization of the planning system itself. The role of public participants was severely restricted by norms and expectations of ‘acceptable’ evidence within the inquiry. For example, inquiry rules dictate that any evidence which is viewed as challenging or contesting government policies is inadmissible. However, policies relating to renewable energy (and wind power, in particular) remain controversial across the UK (Devine-Wright and Devine-Wright, 2006) and therefore criticisms of government policies are at the heart of many objectors’ motivations to oppose such projects. Nevertheless, members of the public who opposed the proposed development due to criticisms of national renewable energy policies could not raise these concerns within the inquiry. These individuals instead had to find alternative justifications for their opposition, which did not necessarily adequately reflect their concerns or interests. This can be viewed as a clear exercise of agenda-setting power, and a means of setting limits to public participation. This is of particular significance given that it has been found that national policies play central roles within planning decisions. For example, in this case within the inquiry outcome it was ‘evident that this emphasis on being in accordance with policies overshadowed the need to fully reflect the interests and concerns of the local community’ (Aitken et al., 2008: 792). National policies have

an omnipotent and untouchable status within planning processes, serving to justify particular decisions and discredit unwelcome opposition.

### **A three-dimensional view of the case**

The situation becomes still more complex when considered with respect to the three-dimensional view of power. While opportunities for public participation clearly existed throughout the planning process, participants were not passive actors straightforwardly presenting their concerns, interests or local knowledge but rather they actively constructed and shaped their participation in accordance with perceived notions of what 'credible' or 'legitimate' participation would be. The three-dimensional view of power acknowledges the power to shape people's beliefs and ideologies. In this case we can see that objectors' beliefs about what constituted 'appropriate' objections were in line with those set out in the planning system – which favours 'objective', 'scientific' rationality (Sandercock, 1998). This active shaping of participation was evidenced through the way in which the local opposition campaign group prioritized more 'objective' issues within the proforma objection letters and through their attempts to construct their opposition as more 'credible'. However, at the subsequent public inquiry such attempts became more explicit.

The public inquiry largely consisted of evidence from witnesses representing the developers and the local opposition group and subsequent cross-examinations by lawyers. Expertise and credentials took on a central role within the public inquiry and cross-examination of witnesses (especially by the developers' lawyer) typically focused on discrediting those of the opposite side. Cross-examination was used to demonstrate that witnesses were less qualified or appropriately experienced than their counterparts who presented evidence on the same topic for the opposing party. Through such methods of cross-examination the boundaries of what was to be considered legitimate knowledge were clearly signalled and the perceived importance of expertise was highlighted. This posed challenges for local objectors presenting evidence at the inquiry. Interviewees who had given evidence on behalf of the opposition group noted that they felt they had to temper their views so as to only include concerns which they could back up with 'scientific' evidence. Witnesses representing the opposition group were largely lay people from the local community, whereas those representing the developers were professional consultants. As such the emphasis on credentials and expertise worked in favour of the developers.

However, while it might be seen that the central position of expert knowledge within the public inquiry served to marginalize lay knowledge – and consequently much of the local opposition's argument – the construction of expert knowledge as central was maintained by all parties (Aitken, 2009). Lay opposition witnesses became disgruntled with the inquiry process and the difficulty that they experienced in presenting evidence. Yet it was not just the developers but also the opposition campaign group who relied on expert witnesses and who were represented by lawyers referring to credentials and expertise as key factors in assessing the legitimacy and credibility of evidence. Representatives of the opposition group actively tried to present their evidence in as 'expert' ways as possible. Despite their evidence largely being based on (typically extensive) local (lay) knowledge, when members of the local community gave evidence on particular topics they typically emphasized any professional or technical credentials they might have in order

to give their evidence more clout. A more nuanced understanding of what constitutes legitimate knowledge, and a greater appreciation of the value of 'lay expertise' may have benefited the local opposition group's case. However, it was in part the opposition group themselves who upheld the constructed distinction between expert and lay knowledge. It is interesting to note that these boundaries were not fixed at the beginning of the inquiry and there may have been greater scope for lay knowledge to be influential. Prior to the inquiry there was not a fixed notion of who counted as an 'expert' or what constituted 'legitimate' knowledge, but through the inquiry process participants (whether lawyers, representatives of the developers or local objectors) actively constructed these boundaries and defined certain individuals as 'experts' and certain (in some cases only very specific) knowledges as 'legitimate'.

On the one hand this might be viewed as an example of two-dimensional power on the part of the local opposition group, since it illustrates their active roles in shaping how topics were discussed at the inquiry. In this way it may be viewed as an exercise in agenda-setting power. However, it can more appropriately be viewed as an example of how members of the public's perceptions of what constitutes legitimate knowledge have been shaped by power present within the structures of the planning system – or wider state institutions. In this way it might also be taken as evidence of subtle forms of social control exerted through the planning system, constraining public participation to secure outcomes which reflect government interests.

The emphasis which was placed on credentials of witnesses distracted from the merits of the evidence which witnesses presented. The aim of cross-examination typically was not to assess whether a witnesses' evidence was robust or meritorious, but rather to prove that particular witnesses were less qualified (and hence less legitimate) than their counterparts representing the opposing parties. By allowing – and even encouraging – this pattern in cross-examination the inquiry easily and consistently overlooked the evidence presented by the opposition group.

In order to illustrate the ways in which this occurred, the following is a brief outline of inquiry debates around two key topics, notably Transport and Roads and Visual Impact. These particular topics have been chosen since they proved to be highly salient throughout all stages of the planning process. For example, through the thematic analysis of objection letters both of these topics were identified as central objection issues (Aitken et al., 2008), and continued to be discussed at some length within the public inquiry. Additionally, through interviews with local objectors it became clear that these are topics about which local objectors had considerable local knowledge. For example, interviewees referred to past experiences driving on the local roads; to the effects of previous road works in the area and to their knowledge of accidents (or near-accidents) involving large vehicles on the proposed transportation route. Interviewees referred to the many years – and in several cases decades – that they had lived in the local area and to their attachment to the local environment. They were extremely familiar with details of the landscape and expressed concerns about damage that may be done to it in relation to their own perception of what made it special. Given this substantial body of local knowledge and the unique local perception which these objectors possessed it is particularly interesting to note how debates at the public inquiry marginalized the role of local knowledge on these topics.

### *Transport and roads*

Transport and roads were discussed early in the inquiry proceedings, however references to perceived dangers or risks relating to this topic continued to arise until the very end of the inquiry – particularly in evidence presented by members of the public in opposition to the development. The main issues discussed were the need for road alterations and closures during or prior to the construction process, and the ability of abnormal loads carrying turbine components to navigate the route – particularly their ability to negotiate certain corners.

While the opposition group's witness contended that the works required to make the road suitable for the necessary abnormal loads would inevitably require significant road closures and consequently disruption to local users, the witness giving evidence on behalf of the developers asserted that he did not perceive that there would be more than three or four road closures of no more than a couple of hours each. The general sentiment among members of the public in attendance was that 'of course' there would be significant disruption; technical arguments did not alleviate the concerns of those appealing to 'commonsense' and local knowledge.

This was again the case with discussions relating to the ability of abnormal loads to navigate a corner in the road by a local church. Concerns were raised about damage that might be caused to the church wall. The opposition group's witness referred to diagrams of the route which clearly showed that it was impossible for the abnormal loads to get around the corner without colliding with the wall. However, his counterpart stressed that the diagrams should not be taken at face value and that they did not take into account the mechanisms of the vehicles which made the corner feasible despite its apparent impossibility. This again, inevitably, led to highly technical arguments and it was suggested by the developers' lawyer that the opposition group's witness was ill-qualified and therefore unable to comprehend the issue properly. The opposition group's witness repeatedly argued that he was presenting evidence based on the information provided in the diagrams and documents, whereas the developers' lawyer and witness argued that this was insufficient.

Consequently, the debate was far-removed from local people wanting to understand the issue in terms of its impact on their life and locality. Much of the cross-examination by the developers' lawyer focused on discrediting the opposition group's witness and showing him to be unable to understand the evidence presented by the developers' witness. The implication was that only experts – and moreover only experts with very particular skills and training – could fully understand or engage with the issues.

### *Visual impact*

The debates surrounding the issue of visual impact again focused primarily on process and expertise of witnesses rather than the evidence itself. The local opposition group's witness was subjected to a gruelling eight-hour cross-examination by the developers' lawyer who appeared to be aiming to thoroughly discredit him. Some six of those hours dealt only with his qualifications and credentials as opposed to the substance of his evidence. The comparatively small amount of time which was devoted to his actual evidence can be

viewed as an attempt to minimize the weight which it was to be accorded. Within interviews, local objectors used this as an example of where the developers' lawyer's approach was inappropriate and excessively brutal. The treatment of this particular witness angered many local objectors.

Where cross-examination did focus on the evidence that was being presented, the attention was on the tools employed in assessing likely visual impact. Photomontages which had been produced by the developers for the Environmental Statement (ES) were heavily criticized by the opposition group's lawyer and witness, who deemed them unrealistic. However, it was argued by the developers' witness and lawyer that photomontages were not intended to be understood as exact representations of the proposed development and that their limitations must be recognized. It was stated that landscape professionals would use them in conjunction with other tools and bearing in mind multiple factors. The implication was that without necessary expertise and training one could not appropriately interpret the photomontages, and that one could not simply consider them as representations of the proposed development. The result was that an issue which might have been expected to be comprehensible to members of the public, and particularly local people familiar with the landscape, was firmly positioned as one which could only be understood by experts with adequate professional training. Lay people concerned for their local landscapes were left feeling belittled and bemused.

Yet representatives of the local opposition group did not contest the central position given to expertise within the inquiry. They did not emphasize the value of their local knowledge which was particular to the area and had been accumulated over many years, and in some cases many decades. They did not attempt to reframe the issues in terms which would have better suited their own range of (lay) expertise. Within interviews while objectors were sceptical of experts and the evidence they presented, they acknowledged a need to present their own case in the language of expertise.

This can be taken as a demonstration of the power present within the planning system to shape people's beliefs and ideologies. As Lukes's (1974 [2004]) set out, the exercise of power does not require overt conflict but rather can take place through shaping people's worldviews so that conflict does not arise. For example, objectors do not protest that their lay knowledge is being sidelined in favour of expert knowledge, or that their concerns are being overlooked, because they have been socialized to accept that expert knowledge exists in a 'real' sense and that it *should* be given a central place within decision-making arenas. This also accords with Wynne's (1982) proposition that public inquiries transmit signals to wider society about what constitutes legitimate knowledge. Thus, objectors may have been acting in response to signals received through their knowledge of previous planning (or other decision-making) processes.

## Conclusions

Bell et al. (2005: 463) have noted 'The structure of the planning system may encourage "oppositional" participation but planning policy and government support for wind energy may make successful opposition increasingly difficult.' In this case objectors were able to effectively express their concerns within the local planning system and as such to have the planning application refused; however, various forms of power were

present within the planning system to restrict the extent to which public participants had a meaningful influence over the final determination of the planning application. This raises questions as to the implications of policy commitments to public participation, particularly in relation to types of developments which are explicitly supported by government policies.

It is tempting to conclude that this case study demonstrates that public participation serves as a form of social control through which the government is able to legitimize decisions for controversial projects by creating the illusion of democratic involvement while restricting the influence or power of those participating. Yet, one must also acknowledge the active roles played by public participants in conforming to modernist views of knowledge and upholding distinctions between expert and lay knowledge as well as boundaries of what constituted legitimate or credible arguments. If one considers this case study according to a one-dimensional view of power (i.e. according to the outcomes of the formal decision-making process), it would appear that the objectors, while powerful in the initial planning application stage, had little or no power at the later public inquiry. However, by considering Lukes's (1974 [2004]) three-dimensional view of power the case study becomes considerably more complex and we are forced to acknowledge a diverse range of forms of power exercised by multiple actors and reflected not only in decision outcomes but also in the structures and processes of the planning system.

While this article argues that power remains predominantly in the hands of decision-makers, and within the structures of the planning system, it is not possible to contend that public participants are *powerless*. Local objectors actively shaped their participation and in several instances successfully dictated which topics were discussed and in what ways. To a certain extent, they had the power to set the agenda both in the initial planning application phase and also at the subsequent public inquiry. However, greater power existed within and beyond the planning system which influenced participants' perceptions of what legitimate participation was. Opportunities existed for participants to challenge prevailing modernist assumptions of what constitutes legitimate knowledge, but they themselves did not perceive this as necessary and as such upheld established norms which ultimately served to disadvantage their case.

It is far simpler to suppose that lay voices are excluded or overlooked through the actions and rules of decision-makers and powerful elites than through their own actions. Such simpler conclusions may be reached in examining processes through a two-dimensional view of power. This would lead one to suggest that elites need to become more flexible and accommodate a wider variety of knowledges. However, by referring to the three-dimensional view of power, one must acknowledge that lay actors are not only responding to visible signals of what is desired (i.e. that they are being invited to participate in a decision-making process), but also to less obvious influences which have shaped their expectations of the process and their perceptions of what a legitimate contribution would be. The case study has highlighted that there may be greater opportunities for more meaningful public participation in the inquiry but that lay people actively construct boundaries to their own detriment. Such boundaries might on the one hand be seen as necessary for expedient decision-making, but on the other hand serve to limit the scope and influence of public participation. The active roles of participants in interpreting what is expected or required of them, and presenting themselves in

ways perceived to lead to optimal benefits must be acknowledged. Even if greater opportunities for public engagement and inclusion of lay knowledges existed, it is likely that lay people taking part would perceive a need to present their knowledge in ‘expert’, objectified ways. Thus, engaging with the opinions and knowledge of members of the public is more problematic than simply setting up encounters or opportunities. Rather it requires a more fundamental change in the ways by which expert and lay knowledges are presented – and subsequently perceived – within society. This casts some ambiguity over to what extent planning processes engender opportunities for public participation or serve as exercises in social control. They have enormous potential to empower members of the public but in reality may instead exemplify and simultaneously reinforce the results of powerful, ongoing social control existing in broader society.

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