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ABSTRACT

Research has shown how the NIMBY explanation for local opposition to energy infrastructures has made its way into the discourses of developers, policy makers, the media and active protesters. However, few studies have explored how community members draw on discourses of NIMBYism to interpret and negotiate responses to local energy proposals. We address this gap drawing on qualitative data from two UK case studies. Analyses show that NIMBY, as a representation of objection, is both widespread and polysemic. Aside from providing a means to talk about space, NIMBY is sometimes rejected by discourses positioning publics as custodians of valued landscapes. In other instances, it is assumed to be a normative and legitimate way for participants to decide what is best for them in a neo-liberal society. The findings reinforce the importance of examining socio-cultural dimensions of social acceptance, specifically representations of community responses to infrastructures as political devices in local siting disputes, and publics as reflexive actors.

KEYWORDS: NIMBY; socio-cultural dimensions; everyday re(-)presentation; ‘regular’ community members; power lines

1. INTRODUCTION

In order to mitigate climate change, governments worldwide are fostering the deployment of low carbon energy technologies, and associated infrastructures such as high voltage power lines (RET) (e.g. Renewables Directive, 2009). When RET are deployed, opposition is often found from the communities living nearby (e.g., Bell, Gray & Haggett, 2013). Both at academic and policy-making levels, it has thus been deemed crucial to better understand local communities’ responses, namely opposition, to RET.

Opposition has conventionally been explained through the NIMBY (Not in my backyard) concept (Dear, 1992; Burningham, 2000). NIMBY has been pointed out as the basis of the environmental justice movement in the USA during the 1980's. It was materialized in local protests by socially, politically and economically disadvantaged communities who fought against the local deployment of hazardous facilities for then reclaiming environmental equity generally (Melosi, 2000; McGurty, 1997; Lake, 1996). As such, during the 1980's, NIMBY was often equated with expressing local autonomy and self-determination by disadvantaged communities (Lake, 1996; Freudenberg & Steinsapir, 1991). However, in the meantime, the meaning of NIMBY has changed, both in how it is academically defined and in how it is practically enacted. More recent academic definitions, in the field of people's responses to energy infrastructures and technologies (Wolsink, 2000; Devine-Wright, 2005), have mainly presented NIMBY as attributing people's negative representations of RET to the ignorance, irrationality and selfishness of objectors (see Burningham, 2000, for a comprehensive review; also Freudenberg & Pastor, 1992; Burningham et al., 2015; for reviews/critiques), and therefore relates to broader views of publics in society such as the deficit perspective (Jasanoff, 2014; Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015). In fact, the older literature discussing the relation between NIMBY, disadvantaged communities and environmental justice, sometimes endorsed what would now be seen as (pejoratively) NIMBY: "the initial protest in Warren County [one of the protests seen as crucial to the development of the environmental justice movement in the USA] began typically, as a narrowly defined, self-interested response to a local threat: 'we don't want that facility in our backyards'. Residents were primarily concerned with public health repercussions from potential groundwater contamination and negative economic impacts of a waste facility near their homes" (McGurty, 1997, p.307). Current (critical) literature on

NIMBY would not conceive this opposition as necessarily NIMBY but instead as a materialization of people's relations with the place where they live and of people's everyday concerns with their health and with making a living (Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015; Devine-Wright, 2009). Traditional conceptions of NIMBY also assume that opposition is spatially determined, only occurring when RET are locally deployed in people's backyards (Devine-Wright, 2011). The fact that politicians, developers, policy-makers and the media have explained opposition in this way has mutually reinforced NIMBY – or the representation of protesters as selfish, ignorant and irrational – as the predominant socio-cultural discourse to understand objections (Freudenburg & Pastor, 1992). In other words, NIMBY has been a representation mainly held by developers, policy-makers, and the media about public understandings of and responses to the local siting of technologies and hazardous facilities (Sebastien, 2017; Entradas, 2016; Barnett et al., 2012; Mannarini & Roccato, 2011).

In the literature of people's responses to RET, researchers have responded to the NIMBY concept in different ways (see Sebastien, 2017, for a review). Some have attempted to empirically verify its claims (e.g. assumptions about spatial proximity: Jones & Eiser, 2009; Swafford & Slattery, 2010; Fast & McLeman, 2012; also Jasanoff, 2014 for a review/critique). Others, as suggested above, have argued that it is too simplistic an explanation for opposition, considering that community responses to RET are shaped by a more variegated set of socio-psychological, cultural, political and geographical factors (Wolsink, 1994; Walker, 1995; Bell et al., 2005; Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015 for a review). Still others have *a priori* contested the value of NIMBY and rejected it as a pejorative and therefore unjust explanation. This last perspective on NIMBY has been translated into studies of how this discourse is used rhetorically by the different actors involved in siting disputes (Burningham, 2000; Cotton & Devine-Wright, 2010; Futák-Campbell & Haggett, 2011;

Barnett et al., 2012). More specifically, this line of research has focused on how NIMBY is used rhetorically by four types of actors that will be discussed in detail below: by developers, policy-makers, the media and active protestors.

In relation to commercial developers, Barnett and colleagues (2012) illustrated that the ways in which industry actors imagine publics affected by facility siting – often based on NIMBY assumptions – have direct consequences for their public engagement practices, notably the avoidance of public meetings in favour of small group public exhibitions, to lessen opportunities for groups to publicly object (see also Cotton & Devine-Wright, 2010; Burningham et al., 2015). In relation to policy makers, Wolsink (1994) and others (e.g., Kang & Jang, 2013) have shown how policies are often guided by NIMBY assumptions even if they are counterproductive in placating public opposition as intended. In relation to the media, Mannarini & Roccato (2011) examined how the Italian press used NIMBY as a representation of local opposition to unwanted facilities between 1998 and 2008. They concluded that the media represent NIMBY both in its conventional, deficit view – people as selfish, ignorant and irrational – and in its participatory view – NIMBY as a struggle for democracy and justice.

In turn, this use of NIMBY has led to protestors becoming aware of how they are represented (Elchereth, Doise & Reicher, 2011; Kessi & Howarth, 2015), giving rise to another line of research into how active protestors respond to typically negative representations. Futák-Campbell & Haggett (2011) analysed an extensive dataset of activists' discourses of objection to large-scale windfarms and illustrate one main trend - the implicit avoidance of NIMBY accusations by stressing the value of landscapes and of the planet instead (p.210). Similarly, Usher (2013) illustrates how protests against a coalmine in

England were successful in its rejection in part by presenting arguments against the project not only focused on local identities and concerns, but by “ ‘jumping scales’ to avoid NIMBY accusations” of parochialism and selfishness (ibid, p.825). Still another example is given by Batel and Castro (2015) regarding protests by community members against the transformation of a XVIIth century convent in Lisbon into a closed luxury condominium. In their protests, protesters explicitly pinpointed their awareness that if the protests were seen to be based on any local concerns and interests – or NIMBY motives – then they would likely be dismissed by the local authorities responsible for this decision-making process (see also McClymont & O’Hare, 2008; Batel et al., 2015; Lennon & Scott, 2015; Sebastien, 2017).

In sum, research so far on the representations and rhetorical use of NIMBY by actors involved in siting disputes has given clear indication that NIMBY has been appropriated and reified by policy-makers, developers and the media, and has also made its way into protesters’ discourses. This research has also indicated that, first, and despite the common definition of NIMBY as representing people as selfish, parochial, ignorant and irrational, NIMBY is a socio-cultural discourse that can be re-presented and used in different ways by different actors, either to reinforce that representation (Barnett et al., 2012), to avoid it (Futák-Campbell & Haggett, 2011), or to contest it (Batel & Castro, 2015). Second, NIMBY has been used by the same actors in multifaceted ways, either to denote a specific motivation to oppose a locally unwanted land use (Bell et al., 2005; Devine-Wright, 2011); as an umbrella term to refer to all local opposition (Burningham, 2000); as a pejorative label used by developers and other actors to dismiss local opposition (Devine-Wright, 2011); or also, more recently, as a discourse reclaiming people’s right to defend their place and related affects (Mannarini & Roccato, 2011). In fact, one core characteristic of the neo-liberal capitalist societies where ‘NIMBY’ land use disputes typically take place is the expectation

that it is each individual's responsibility to take care of their health and of the environment (Rose, 1990; Lockie, 2017), including accepting local RET. In this context, opposing RET is then presented as illegitimate, independently of the shadows of business-as-usual, colonialism and inequalities that oftentimes accompany the deployment of these infrastructures (Batel, 2018; Nadai & Labussiere, 2017).

However, to date this line of research has overlooked whether NIMBY has made its way into the discourse of regular community members by showing how they too might draw on, contest or avoid the NIMBY explanation. As shown above, the focus of research has been on the discourses of active protesters, developers, policy-makers and the media. But as van der Horst (2007, p.2710) suggested, *'The group of active opponents can be subdivided into protest leaders or organisers and the generally much larger group of concerned residents (...) There is reason to suspect that many people in both groups are sufficiently politically astute to adjust their voiced opinions on the basis of who they are talking to'*.

It is a significant gap that few studies have examined the rhetoric of 'concerned residents' (i.e. 'regular' community members, van der Horst, 2007) to investigate how they re-present, think about, use, contest and/or negotiate NIMBY. This gap is important for several reasons. Firstly, because concerned residents are the majority of individuals who are directly affected by siting proposals (Bell et al., 2005); secondly, because it will extend our understanding of the consequences of the use of NIMBY discourse by stakeholders, such as policy makers and developers; and thirdly, it will reveal, ~~for the first time~~, how non-active residents might counteract those consequences.

We depart from the idea that "while academic research increasingly rejects NIMBYism as an accurate or useful way of understanding opposition, it remains a powerful public

discourse” (Burningham et al., 2015, 247), of which not only developers, policy-makers, the media and active protestors are aware, but also regular community members and publics in general. In other words, we aim to explore how these issue-oriented communities (Jasanoff, 2014; Batel, 2018) re-present how other actors represent them. This involves analysis of how NIMBY as a re-presentation has actually been adopted in everyday discourses by community members affected by siting processes, whether and in what manner it is invoked by them, and with what interactional or political purposes and consequences. ~~In so doing, this study contributes to calls to develop analyses that take the local context seriously when investigating how NIMBY discourses are rhetorically used within RET deployment disputes and with what effect (Burningham et al., 2015; Lennon & Scott, 2015; Futák Campbell & Haggett, 2011; Burningham, 2000).~~

2. METHOD

This study draws on two case studies of RET deployment in the UK - the Hinkley Point C connection project in South West England (this power line was planned to connect a new nuclear power station to the grid); and the MidWales connection project (this power line was planned to connect new onshore wind farms in Wales to the grid). Informed by a discursive methodological approach, which examines language not as a neutral ‘container’ of meanings but instead as an active means of constructing reality (see also Di Masso, Dixon & Pol, 2011; Ellis, Barry & Robinson, 2007), eight focus groups were conducted in total, four for the Hinkley Point C connection (two of them in the same settlement - CS1/FG2a and CS1/FG2b), and four for the Mid Wales connection (two of them in the same settlement – CS2/FG5a and CS2/FG5b). Each focus group (median length = 90 min) was composed of 5-8 participants

(total number of participants = 50) who were local residents (from the respective settlement), recruited through a market research company to guarantee a heterogeneous sample of adult residents in terms of socio-demographic characteristics (see Table 1).

--- TABLE 1 ---

Focus groups were conducted in a room in the town/village hall whenever possible or, in an alternative community space. The focus groups were audio recorded with the informed consent of the participants, and full confidentiality and anonymity guaranteed. The topics in the focus groups' guidelines concentrated on two main themes: questions around participants' relation with the place where they live (e.g., How do you feel about living in this place; has this area changed a lot in the last few years? In what ways?); and questions about power lines in general and the local project to be constructed (e.g., Can you tell me more about the proposal to develop a high voltage power line in this area? What is your position about the project? Why?). It is important to note that the moderator of the focus groups allowed NIMBY discourse to emerge spontaneously from participants' discussions, without raising it first. All focus group interviews were fully transcribed and data analysis performed through the software Atlas.ti v.5.2. At the initial stage, a Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was performed, to examine if and how participants talked about NIMBY and related assumptions, in explicit and/or implicit ways. More specifically, we have structured this first analysis of the data following the main objectives of the paper and identifying discourses that related with them: to identify if people use the concept of NIMBY in their discourses, how and with what purposes; and to examine if and how people re-present other groups' views on

their practices as NIMBY and what consequences that might have. This first stage allowed us to identify the main themes regarding NIMBY which are identified in the bullet points (a. to c.) of the Analyses section below and which are associated with the main objectives of the paper. After this, a second, more fine-grained discursive rhetorical analysis (see Billig, 1991; Batel et al., 2015), was performed. The quotations presented in the next section and related analyses tried to follow good practice in doing discourse analysis (e.g., Antaki et al., 2003), namely, the presented extracts aim to be the most paradigmatic of the discourses of the participants and of associated socio-psychological, cultural and political processes.

3. ANALYSES

a. The NIMBY concept as a spatial discourse

One of the first dimensions to be analyzed was if NIMBY, as a concept and as a representational resource, is actually prevalent in everyday discourse, in this case accessed through participants' spontaneous discussions. As the examples below illustrate, spatial aspects of NIMBY, in its different appropriations and associated concepts – e.g., back yard, back garden – was often ($N=15^1$) used by participants (P) during the discussions:

P3 - I don't feel that I can say I don't want a pylon in my back garden but how about putting it in your back garden I don't think I can say that (CS1, FG1²)

¹ This refers to the number of times that NIMBY and associated concepts were used across all the focus groups, by the same or different participants.

² These notations refer to: CS1=Case Study 1 (Hinkley Point C connection); CS2=Case Study 2 (Mid Wales connection); FG=Focus Group 1, 2, 2a, 2b, 3, 4, 5a, or 5c (as described in the Method).

P5 – *I’ve heard a rumour of one of the landowners living down here “Well I’ve no problem in having one of those pylons in my back yard, I’ve been told they’re going to give me a lot of money”* (CS2, FG1)

These extracts suggest how NIMBY – Not in My Back Yard – is already part of everyday discourse as a way of talking about space, and in particular to changes taking place near where people live (see Devine-Wright, 2011, for a discussion). In fact, whereas these discourses seem to use NIMBY only as a neutral concept to talk about spatial issues, other participants’ discourses highlighted the many different ways, functions and consequences with which NIMBY can be used, as illustrated next.

b. NIMBY re-presentations, hetero-representations and their impact

As highlighted in the Introduction, it is crucial to understand not only the practices of developers and other actors regarding NIMBY, but also the consequences of those practices for community members. An important line of enquiry is to examine whether residents 1) are not aware of developers’ and other actors’ representations about themselves, but are still impacted – often negatively – by those representations; or 2) are aware of those representations and may or may not make use of them in different ways to negotiate responses to RET (see van der Horst, 2007). We will now discuss what the data from the focus groups can reveal regarding these two aspects.

Starting with the first, one important question to pursue is: what are the consequences of developers and other actors re-presenting local opposition as NIMBY and reproducing that in their practices? As discussed before, one of the most commonly identified and researched

consequences is a deficiency in engaging community members in the decision-making process (see Barnett et al., 2012; Knudsen et al., 2015). However, there is another type of consequence that is less often considered, such as when residents actually conform to developers' representations of themselves. Castro and Mouro (2016) have illustrated how community members can imagine and engage with what they think decision-makers think about them (also Batel & Castro, 2015). Our analyses revealed that this happens in a more implicit way regarding NIMBY. Let us take the example below:

P6 - *We're the only ones that suddenly are going 'Oh, let's have nuclear all round, let's build two or three' and it just seems to me that right from the top down, and as I say I'm not particularly well educated and I'm not a clever person, but it just seems so straight forward to me in that respect that we're just not getting the full picture* (...) (CS1, FG4)

Despite the fact that this person is putting forward her opinion within a focus group context, which is valid whatever the opinion is, this extract highlights how she deviates from giving her opinion about energy politics in the UK, to quickly qualify it by being '*not particularly well educated and I'm not a clever person*'³. This justification resonates with the definition of NIMBY and with what it entails in terms of developers' and other actors' expectations regarding the skills, capacities or resources one must have in order for participation in the decision-making process to be considered legitimate – not being ignorant and irrational, or, in other words, being well educated and clever. This might be an example

³ This extract could also be alternatively interpreted as the participant wanting to emphasize, in more of an ironic way, that this issue is so obvious that even a person who is not very clever and well-educated should understand it. However, and taking into account how this was uttered by the participant at stake and his/her interventions in the remainder of the focus group - even following the moderator's further discussions of this issue -, the interpretations provided in the main text seem to be the most adequate ones.

of how negative representations of community members are internalized and have negative consequences for their practices, as has already been found for other asymmetric inter-group relations, such as between colonizers and the colonized (Howarth, 2004; Kessi & Howarth, 2015). At a practical level, believing that one might not be clever and well educated enough to have a legitimate opinion about these issues might entail apathy and non-participation in decision-making processes (see also Knudsen et al., 2015).

Emphasizing a lack of ‘expert knowledge’ might also be read through the lens of ‘post-truth’ socio-economic and political contexts (Lockie, 2017). Brexit and the election of President Trump in the USA are two reflections of how not belonging to elites that hold high literacy levels and intellectual types of expertise, who are often left-wing and driven by cultural politics (see Gregg, 2008; Inglehart & Norris, 2016) - is a powerful rhetorical device to garner support for one’s own claims, by resonating with the majority of ‘ordinary’ people/us. The discourse in the extract above is oriented towards all UK citizens, not just local residents (“We’re the only ones that”). By referencing ‘ordinary people in the real world’ (see Rapley, 1998), the claim is made that citizens should be more informed than they currently are about the reasons for supporting new nuclear power plants in the UK.

Community members might also be explicitly aware of negative representations that other actors hold about them – as ‘local community members’ generally and as potential objectors in these specific case studies - and might also try to contest and negotiate them (Castro & Mouro, 2016). In their 2015 paper, Burningham and colleagues illustrate how developers involved with the deployment of RET often re-present and explain local opposition to the construction of RET infrastructures through NIMBY. As the authors put it (p.257), “while outright ascriptions of NIMBYism were rare, the discourse of NIMBYism

saturates developers' accounts and is particularly evident through the attribution of an array of deficits to opponents". It is therefore important to examine the consequences that the representations of developers might have for community members' own representations and practices regarding RET (e.g., Cotton & Devine-Wright, 2010; Barnett et al., 2012). These hetero-representations or meta-knowledge – what we think others are thinking about a certain object, related with our ability to think beyond what we ourselves think (Elcheroth, Doise & Reicher, 2011) – were also present in the discourses of the participants in the focus groups, not only regarding developers, but also other members of the public and of other communities. This is exemplified below:

P6 – (...) *it might be ninety per cent who are against it and will say so, you know, but I think there are people who regard us all as*

P5 – NIMBYs

P6 - NIMBYs

(...)

P4 - *a split between people who just think we are just being NIMBYs and other people who just kind of, you know, appreciate the issue (...)* (CS2, FG1)

P4 – (...) *a beautiful natural environment and in a way you know there's a criticism that we are somehow NIMBYS not in my back yard but it's not just that you're also again custodians of this area* (CS2, FG1)

These extracts highlight how community members have meta-knowledge of what other people might think about them and their practices. This last example, while trying to re-frame NIMBY objectors in a more positive light as custodians of this area and therefore transcending the local – with the negativity it might entail in terms of a presumed parochiality (Tomaney,

2013) - might be strategically used to legitimize the claims of these community members (see Batel & Castro, 2015; Futák-Campbell & Haggett, 2011). Presenting objectors as ‘custodians of this area’ resonates with the label ‘place protector’ used in the literature to describe those whose opposition to development arises from strong attachments and identities embedded in local places impacted by siting proposals (Devine-Wright, 2009; Bell et al., 2013).

A useful parallel might be made between this re-presentation of NIMBY and the re-appropriation of derogatory labels by minority or oppressed groups to contest relations of domination, with regards to the dynamics of relations between different ethnic groups and associated identity processes (Verkuyten, 2003). The example below also illustrates this well, this time by re-defining NIMBY as being against the spoiling of the countryside:

I think it's a lovely place and I think to put pylons right across the back of the village and also possible put two bloody great big wind turbines down on the Smarts site eighty-four metres high um which is down-wind of the village which is where we'd get the noise and pollution from I think is I think is spoiling the countryside, I'm a NIMBY
(CS1, FG1)

This, again, might be a powerful resource to legitimize NIMBY (i.e., opposing a facility near the place where one lives), as it equates being a NIMBY with protecting a pervasive cultural representation, especially in Britain, of the countryside as natural, unspoilt and pristine and therefore having to be protected from destruction by the industrial, human and dirty essence of RET (see Batel et al., 2015; Woods, 2017). However, participants also used NIMBY in many other different ways and tried to legitimize it through strategies other than solely re-framing NIMBY. This is illustrated in the extracts below:

P6 - *Mm you wouldn't want to live right by a pylon would you*

P3 - *I think that basically everybody sort of agrees that they don't want it in their back garden don't they* (CS2, FG4)

P2 - *we're probably all NIMBYs, we don't want it in our backyard do we?* (...)

P3: (joking) *Yeah, I'd love a massive pylon in my back garden, can I have two?* (CS1, FG3)

Here, we can consider that in order to 'legitimise NIMBY', the strategy used is to 'NIMBY the Other'. In other words, meta-knowledge is used in order to strategically emphasize the social, descriptive norms regarding the deployment of power lines – here taken as by definition unwanted energy infrastructures, similar to the LULU concept (Locally Unwanted Land Use – Freudenberg & Pastor, 1992) – in people's 'back gardens'. By confronting other people with their – assumed to be similar – position regarding the deployment of a power line near the place where they live (*you wouldn't want to live right by a pylon, **would you?***) and by relying on norms, what society as a whole thinks (***everybody sort of agrees that they don't want it in their back garden***), these discourses are able to legitimately make the case that it is 'normal' and conventional to be NIMBY, as in locally opposing RET. The use of the extreme case formulation "everybody" (Pomerantz, 1986) aims to close down the space for any other alternative to be considered. In this way, discourses legitimise 'selfishness' and parochialism. As one of the participants put it, relying on irony as a discursive resource: 'yeah, I'd love a massive pylon in my back garden, can I have two?' (CS1, FG3).

More interesting is what this seems to tell us about the impact of neo-liberal institutional representations of citizens as self-governed (Rose, 1990), on citizens' own representations of themselves and how they should act – here with a contrary effect to that

which policy-makers and developers would normally expect in capitalist and neo-liberal societies in the global North. What these discourses seem to highlight is that citizens, here as community members, consider that if they are individuals responsible for their own choices in other important domains of public life, such as health and energy consumption (Lockie, 2017), then why should they not be deemed as responsible citizens able to make their own choices regarding the deployment of RET near the place where they live? These analyses corroborate studies that highlight the consciousness, awareness and agency of people's responses to RET (Cohen, Reichl & Schmidthaler, 2014)⁴.

Finally, we also found discourses that did not appear to try to justify, re-frame or legitimize NIMBY in any way. Instead, those discourses primarily took the perspective of the Other for non-legitimising NIMBY or local opposition to RET.

c. Non-legitimising NIMBY by taking the perspective of the Other

In the extracts below, discourses use meta-knowledge to discuss the deployment of RET. However, by contrast to the extracts just discussed, they use it in a different perspective-taking way (Jovchelovitch, 2007):

P2 - *there's always somebody to upset no matter what you're doing*

(...)

⁴ With this we do not aim to imply that responses to RET are only rational - they are also emotional/affective and symbolic – and that even when they are only rational, this rationality is based on an economic cost-benefit ratio only – it might also be based on identity politics and on psycho-social, experiential, dimensions (Lertzman, 2015).

P3 - *you put cables under the ground they complain you put cables over the ground they complain you have wind power it upsets the birds migratory systems you have tidal systems it upsets the birds in the estuaries it upsets the fish and the dolphins you have nuclear power they don't like that fossil fuels they don't like that they've always got something to complain about I'll tell you what they will be the first ones when they come home to go on the internet and the powers not on they'll be whining (CS2, FG3)*

P4 - *I don't feel that I can say I don't want a pylon in my back garden but how about putting it in your back garden, I don't think I can say that* (CS1, FG1)

P3 - *Well nobody wants it, that's the thing.* (CS1, FG3)

As we can see, these extracts depart from acknowledgement of the norm or meta-knowledge about the deployment of RET near the place where people live – that *well, nobody wants it* – to argue that it being the case that nobody wants it, then ‘*I don't feel that I can say I don't want a pylon in my back garden but how about putting it in your back garden, I don't think I can say that*’. Perspective-taking seems to allow people to accept – albeit not support (Batel et al., 2013) – the deployment of RET near the place where they live, as they are aware of the impact that opposing RET might have for other people in other places. Nevertheless, the first two extracts might also suggest a somewhat fatalist discourse over energy-related decision making and other associated issues, in line with Douglas & Wildavsky's (1982) proposal on the different types of socio-cultural worldviews. Such a stand might be seen as another way of undermining the legitimacy of opposition to RET, asserting a common sense ‘truth’ that there will always be someone who will protest, no matter what.

Another interesting aspect, from the second extract above, highlights how if one does not want RET to be deployed in their back yard, then that has to be compensated by a change of energy consumption habits. Discourses that took into account the place of RET in the larger energy system – encompassing both energy supply and demand - were not common throughout the focus groups. This could be expected given that discourses of academic research and policy-making also often omit those interconnections (see Barry & Ellis, 2011; Chilvers & Longhurst, 2016). However, some participants did actively discuss those interconnections, pinpointing other configurations of energy systems and how NIMBY has to be re-focused on that:

P5 - *I think I've got an open mind on it and as far as micro-generation as far as a um a community get involved and one turbine next to a substation or next to their house um is - I haven't got a problem with that and I think there is a place for on shore wind on a smaller scale um if - if particularly if it's micro-generation and you're using it yourself* (CS2, FG1)

In these extracts, qualified acceptance of wind energy (see Bell et al., 2013) is evidently materialized – the first discourse puts it clearly that ‘*I haven't got a problem with that*’ (...) ‘*as far as micro-generation, as far as a um a community get involved*’. In other words, opposition is often found not because people are against the generation of renewable energy, but to how RET are deployed. Two main problems with that are pinpointed above: the maintenance of a centralized energy system, based on macro-generation and which therefore generates, arguably, much more negative impacts than a decentralized micro-generation based one (see Bell et al., 2013); and also the lack of genuine community engagement in centralized RET-related decision-making processes (Walker, 2009; Knudsen

et al., 2015; see also Barry & Ellis, 2011). The evidence, even if sparse, of these discourses throughout the focus groups is important because it reveals that some people are aware of and already engaging with alternatives to the current energy system which are arguably more environmentally and socially sustainable. In this way, they appear to be contesting the hegemonic, business-as-usual discourses that pervade the practices of developers, policy-makers and other RET and environment-related stakeholders (Barry & Ellis, 2011). Moreover, this highlights how academic research itself and specifically research into the social acceptance of RET (Wüstenhagen et al., 2007) often reproduces institutional discourses and in so doing, fails to discuss relevant alternatives to the energy system and towards both social and environmental sustainability (Walker, 2009; but see Cohen et al., 2014). These extracts tell us that researchers must also overcome the fundamental assumption that people do recognize the need for (centralized large-scale) energy infrastructures, but oppose them in their backyards.

However, it is also important to suggest an alternative interpretation, that people use these discourses as strategic resources – discourses of decentralised energy are already seen as ‘desirable’ and legitimate enough but also as still largely inconsequential. Participants might use these discourses as a way to object to the deployment of RET in general – if only they would be smaller and community-based. In fact, we can never forget the situated and political character of people’s re-presenting (Batel et al., 2015; van der Horst, 2007).

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The main aim of this paper was to investigate socio-cultural aspects of social acceptance, in particular whether and how ‘regular’ (i.e. non-protestor) community members

who are directly affected by the deployment of RET re-present NIMBY in their discourses and with what purposes. Few studies have so far focused on the rhetoric of non-active protestors even if these are the majority of individuals who are directly affected by siting disputes. Our research, therefore, extends understanding of both the consequences of the use of NIMBY as a discourse by developers, policy-makers and the media, and if and how publics counteract those consequences. In so doing, this paper contributes to calls (e.g., Burningham et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2007) to provide a more socially embedded and rhetorical analysis of how NIMBY is used within RET disputes and with what effect.

Our analyses suggest that NIMBY might already be a hegemonic representation in UK culture that is widespread in everyday discourses, used in many different ways and to fulfil different functions. It is commonly used as a way of talking about space and people's relations with it, with particular relevance for the local area near to where people live (Devine-Wright, 2011). More than this and in line with previous research (e.g., Futák-Campbell & Haggett, 2011), there are discourses that use NIMBY only to implicitly or explicitly dismiss being labelled as such – however, we have also shown that this is often accompanied by a re-framing and re-negotiation of the meanings of NIMBY.

The polysemic use of NIMBY and of associated re-presentations for negotiating responses to RET highlights the relevance of performing discursive analyses of how NIMBY is actually talked about. It also contests the information deficit model of the public (Jasanoff, 2014) by revealing the role of metaknowledge - how people are aware of what is said about them, why and with what effects – or, in other words, how they are reflexive (Kessi & Howarth, 2015). The analyses contest the NIMBY presupposition by revealing how NIMBY and other discourses on community, place and energy are used in political ways, to defend

specific interests and identities against what are seen to be unfair and non-inclusive decision-making processes for the deployment of RET (Batel et al., 2015; also Bailey & Darkal, 2018). Finally, the analyses presented here suggest that NIMBY is being used in public discourse in several ways – as a way of referring to local communities’ voices regarding unwanted changes affecting the place where they live; as opposition that is selfish, irrational and ignorant and, therefore, non-legitimate; or just as a shorthand for local opposition (see also Mannarini & Roccato, 2011).

Future research should further examine the socio-cultural contexts in which different meanings of NIMBY are used, and additionally which interpretations of those meanings make more sense to the participants. For this, perhaps an interviewing technique closer to interpretative phenomenological analysis could prove useful (Heiskanen et al., 2015). It would also be important to further explore the role played by political affiliation and other associated dimensions in different re-presentations of NIMBY. Future research should also examine these issues in other socio-cultural contexts and regarding other forms of RET, questioning if this pervasiveness of NIMBY representations is peculiar to the socio-political, cultural and linguistic context of the UK and perhaps the USA. Some research suggests that it is not (e.g., Mannarini et al., 2009 and Batel & Castro, 2015, have focused in other socio-political, cultural and linguistic contexts in Southern Europe – Italy and Portugal, respectively), which makes sense given the common neo-liberal and capitalist background of the deployment of RET in the wider global North – but it would be relevant to empirically examine this. It would also be interesting to explore the questions explored here regarding other types of RET, and also RET at other scales, such as meso-scale community level ones (Walker and Cass, 2007).

In conclusion, this paper contributes to research on socio-cultural and rhetorical approaches to how NIMBY is used within RET disputes and with what effect (Burningham et al., 2015). Aside from the aspects highlighted above, we finish by indicating four key issues that require emphasis in future research. First, these analyses might suggest that the internalization of developers' representations of local community members as NIMBY by the latter, can provoke apathy regarding their participation in RET-related decision making (Howarth, 2004; Kessi & Howarth, 2015). Examining this hypothesis is a crucial avenue for future research. Second, our findings suggest that it is very important to take reflexivity into account in future studies of siting conflicts as it highlights the relevance of researchers considering *de facto* – not only in principle – community members as research participants who are 'equals' and discussing with them in a direct, clear and honest way our objectives. If we want to ask them about NIMBY, then we should directly ask them if they think that they are NIMBYs and why or why not, and if they believe that other groups think that they are NIMBYs and what they believe could be the consequences of that for their practices. The importance of this was accentuated in our analyses by the fact that participants pinpointed important issues that researchers rarely consider themselves – such as other configurations of energy systems and associated socio-political organisations (Chilvers & Longhurst, 2016).

Third, the analyses highlight that NIMBY is still a strong and pervasive representation in the public sphere in the UK. Despite the fact that analyses also showed that NIMBY is not univocal, the different meanings and appropriations of NIMBY are often conflated with each other in many contexts, such as the media or developers' discourses. This makes the use of NIMBY in general risky (see Burningham, 2000; Batel et al., 2013) and therefore it might be important for academic research, policy-makers, developers and the media to use other

concepts to talk about opposition to RET that counteract the negative connotations and consequences of NIMBY as a representation.

Finally, future research could consider these discourses in light of the fact that power relations between community members also exist and that some members are more capable of contesting RET projects than others (e.g., Anderson, 2013; Barry & Ellis, 2011). Meta-knowledge was used by some participants to emphasize how someone somewhere will have to be affected by the deployment of RET and so why should this not be themselves in that local area. This adds to previous research by showing that perspective-taking can be used when negotiating responses to the deployment of RET, which might have the effect of making explicit power relations with other communities that goes beyond the developer vs. local community divide that has become conventional in social acceptance research.

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