

WIND POWER PERCEPTIONS

Fair play for municipalities

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The development of wind farms is frequently the subject of discussions about fairness and justice in planning processes. The need to consider the degree of acceptance or opposition of local communities is the focus of much research. However, the perceptions of municipalities towards such energy developments remains less discussed, despite their important role in the process. Inger-Lise Saglie and colleagues at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences and the Fridtjof Nansen Institute in Norway address this gap by exploring the factors that shape municipal perceptions of fairness at the political and administrative level for five representative locations in Norway that are positive towards, and host, wind power projects.

The researchers undertook semi-structured interviews with 34 key actors in the licencing process from local to national levels and in the political and administrative management of the host municipalities. Alongside a survey of official documents and secondary literature, the researchers analysed the data through a framework of fairness. The findings highlight the importance of outcome fairness to the municipalities, who expect to receive economic compensation for hosting wind farms, typically in the form of property taxes. This compensation balances the environmental burden of the projects and supports the municipalities' primary role of welfare service provision. Process fairness is also important, with participation and inclusion in licencing being necessary for municipalities' sense of fairness. Finally, given that municipalities tend to compare their own situation to that of others — particularly those locations hosting more lucrative hydropower projects — the researchers introduce the concept of relative fairness. This helps to explain both the perception of fairness experienced by municipalities and their levels of expectation in terms of treatment for hosting wind-power developments.

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