



## The good process or the great illusion? A spatial perspective on public participation in Danish municipal wind turbine planning

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## The good process or the great illusion?

### A spatial perspective on public participation in Danish municipal wind turbine planning

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This paper explores the nature of public participation in Danish municipal wind power planning. Although the procedure for involving citizens embedded in the environmental impact assessment (EIA) procedure for wind power projects is often praised for its participatory character, the approach is not without problems. In this paper, we identify the limitations and potentials of the public space provided for citizen involvement. By means of Gaventa's<sup>1</sup> terminology suggesting a continuum of public spaces for participation, the paper shows how the planning process can be approached from different spatial perspectives – each of them illuminating different forms of power, resistance and opportunities. Based on several cases of Danish wind power planning processes, three spatial categories are explored – the public space as a respectively *invited*, *closed* and *claimed* space. It will be shown that the overall space provided reflects a closed space. Although citizens are invited to participate in a consultation process by the planning authorities, this invited space is characterized by a deficit of openness, impartiality, transparency, influence and accountability. Hence, the planning process tends to decouple citizens' everyday experiences and knowledge while providing space for economic and strategic interests. The incapability of the existing procedure and the inherent public space to capture both the concerns and potentials among neighbors towards wind turbines results in the formation of claimed spaces in terms of counter-publics outside the institutionalized political space from where citizens organize and resist wind turbines. The paper suggests that if the planning procedure should improve in terms of citizen participation it must be reconstituted as a *reflective* space that functions as a medium for supporting the community to experiment and explore new and more holistic approaches to wind turbine planning.

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<sup>1</sup> Gaventa, IDS Bulletin **37**(6) (2006)

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