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Whose Expertise and Whose Knowledge Matter? Influencing Wind Power Decisions in Norway

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ABSTRACT

Norway is committed to promoting energy from renewable sources, but wind power installations are often sited in areas where the environment remains relatively untouched. This has generated a debate about the acceptability of such installations in the country. Most municipalities in Norway hold an unofficial veto power over the outcomes of proposals for wind power developments, so the ways that local attitudes and beliefs are influenced could be crucial to the outcome of licensing decisions. This research explores how elected officials come to hear about proposed wind farm developments, whose knowledge and expertise they trust on the issue – as well as whose is discounted – and how this impacts the eventual perceptions that they adopt. We investigate the persuasive influence of narrative messaging on both supportive and oppositional stakeholders in a land-based wind power licensing process in Norway.

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Introduction

Norway is committed to promoting energy production from renewable sources (Blindheim, 2015), spurring its government to create policies for the development of land-based wind power (OED, 2016). Since hydroelectricity already provides a power surplus nine out of every ten years (Inderberg et al., 2019), reasons for producing more renewable electricity may not seem obvious to all Norwegians (Saglie et al., 2020). As a result, conflicts have developed between municipal interests in local land-use planning and the national – and global – interest in generating more renewable energy (Darpö, 2020).

Nevertheless, wind power production has increased significantly in Norway over the last decade (Vatn, 2019), with wind farms often sited in remote areas where wind resources are plentiful but where nature is relatively untouched (Inderberg et al., 2020). Since Norwegian municipalities play a role in taking care of local environmental values, any potential economic or political benefits must be balanced against negative environmental impacts (Blindheim, 2015; Saglie et al., 2020). This has drawn many local municipalities into a debate about the acceptability of land-based wind power, which has been prominent in the Norwegian media (Dugstad et al., 2020).

Thanks to Norway's long history of democratic local governance, wind power projects are unlikely to be approved unless they have local support (Blindheim, 2015). Municipalities are therefore said to hold an unofficial veto power over associated licensing processes

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(Inderberg et al., 2019). As such, the ways that local attitudes and beliefs are influenced could be crucial to the outcome of licensing decisions. Since perceptions of wind farms are affected by communities of interest both inside and outside of the local context, understanding local networks of influence can help explain the outcomes of local governance (Devine-Wright, 2005; Toke et al., 2008; Wolsink, 2007).

This research explores how elected officials come to hear about proposed wind farm developments, whose knowledge and expertise they trust on the issue – as well as whose is discounted – and how this impacts the eventual perceptions that they adopt. In the following pilot study, we investigate the persuasive influence of narrative messaging on both supportive and oppositional stakeholders in a land-based wind power licensing process in Norway.

Literature review

In land-based wind power conflicts, Ellis et al. (2007) contend that it is not necessarily the “truth” that wins the debate, but those who are able to assert their narrative into the public discourse who emerge as the dominant parties. Narratives are the stories that people tell one another (Jones & Song, 2014), weaving together fragmented observations to construct meanings and realities (McComas & Shanahan, 1999). The field of narrative persuasion investigates how information placed within narratives can alter people’s perceptions of reality (Dahlstrom, 2010), with the associated research suggesting that our attitudes and behaviors are vulnerable to influence at the hands of information we are exposed to (Green & Brock, 2000). Indeed, media has been said to powerfully influence environmental perceptions (Shriver-Rice et al., 2022), and narratives have been found to be persuasive even in polarizing and contentious topics (Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2023). Across the existing research into narrative persuasion, several theoretical mechanisms have been identified to explain the persuasiveness of narrative communication approaches, including *transportation*, *identification*, and *emotion* (Bekalu et al., 2018). Transportation is defined as the convergence of attention, imagery, and feelings focused on story events (Green & Brock, 2000) that is brought about when an individual experiences a story. The more transported a viewer becomes, the more likely they are to change their thoughts to be more consistent with the narrative (Green et al., 2004; Murphy et al., 2011) and the more their ability to generate counterarguments may be suppressed (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). Identification refers to the connection the audience feels to the characters in a narrative (Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2023). It is an imaginative process through which an audience member assumes the identity, goals, and perspective of a character (Cohen, 2001). Additionally, emotional arousal is a key modulator of other mechanisms of narrative engagement, meaning narratives are likely to be particularly powerful when the emotional reactions to them are strong (Fitzgerald & Green, 2017).

Dahlstrom (2021) claims that a significant portion of the effects a message may have on an individual depend not upon the content or form of the message, but upon that individual’s pre-existing knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs. Such predispositions can bias interpretations of incoming information (Nisbet et al., 2015), including narratives (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008), meaning responses to any message are unlikely to be universal (Crow & Jones, 2018). Such insights suggest that any exposure to a narrative message is part of a continuum, with new message effects superimposed upon those that have come before (Oschatz & Marker, 2020). Rather than a binary mechanism, then, persuasion might be better understood as a journey through which many narratives are imposed on one another over time – as components of a larger story (Fisher, 1989). Additionally, behavioral responses to communication depend both on the culture of the audience and on the source of the message (Michaelis, 2007; Colvin et al., 2020). Indeed, source effects, such as the perceived credibility and expertise of the source of the message by its recipient (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993), are well documented as being important components of message persuasion (Jones & McBeth, 2010), where well-known institutions are considered to be “more truthful” and their messages most likely to be shared on social media (Shriver-Rice et al., 2022).

According to Inderberg et al. (2019), NGOs represent a marginalized stakeholder group in Norwegian land-based wind power licensing processes, with little chance of stopping a project. Yet, NGOs have been noted elsewhere for their ability to construct persuasive narratives about environmental impacts (Murphy-Gregory, 2018). Indeed, in the time since Inderberg's research was published, a significant nationwide debate led to Norway's national framework for wind power development being abandoned, with several high-profile NGOs taking oppositional stances. One of those NGOs was Norway's largest outdoor organization, *Den Norske Turistforening* (DNT), the Norwegian trekking association.

Ween and Abram (2012) argue that, since its foundation in 1868, DNT and Norwegian nation-building have been mutually influential. DNT is said to play a major political role in defining acceptable uses of land (Ween & Abram, 2012) and, through the provision of trails and cabins, has played an important role in cementing the concept of *friluftsliv* – recreational activities conducted in nature (Waalder, 2022) – as integral to Norwegians' national identity (Slagstad, 2018; Ween & Abram, 2012; Westskog et al., 2021). DNT boasts a membership of more than 300,000 individuals (around 5% of the national population) spread across 57 local chapters (DNT, n.d.), making it one of the largest civil society organizations in Norway (Ween & Abram, 2012). As an outspoken opponent of wind power development, DNT has been very active in wind power cases (Darpö, 2020) and represents a loud – and trusted – voice in the public discourse surrounding this topic.

Norway is divided into 357 administrative municipalities (Bolstad, 2024), largely distinguished by geographical features such as mountains, fjords, and islands, and varying greatly in population (from under 200 to over 690,000) (Haug, 2022). Municipal governments are responsible for services including local primary education, culture and business development, and the management of environmental issues (Regjeringen, 2014). Larvik is a town located about 130 km southwest of Oslo, and is also the name given to the surrounding municipality, home to just under 50,000 people (Larvik Kommune, 2022). The center of town rests on the side of a hill, bisected by the river Farris, which flows down into the adjacent fjord. Largely considered a summer destination (Hoiberg, n.d.), Larvik boasts beaches, forests, lakes, a spa, and many opportunities for practicing *friluftsliv*.

Larvik vindkraftverk (hereafter, Larvik wind farm) was a planned wind power installation consisting of three wind turbines, each measuring 180 m to their full height. The wind farm was intended to be located in an area west of Larvik town, between a nearby motorway and a local stone quarry. The wind farm would produce approximately 35 million kWh per year, equivalent to the power needed for around 2000 households. Due to the relatively small size of the proposed development, the developer was not obliged to conduct a major environmental impact assessment (Inderberg et al., 2020). Nevertheless, a minor impact assessment conducted as part of the license application suggested that Larvik wind farm was not expected to have any long-term consequences on continuous forest areas, only small impacts for flora and fauna, no major noise impacts on homes, and only minor impacts on outdoor life and tourism interests. Finally, the visible implications were not found to be significant. Nevertheless, the application was ultimately rejected by the local municipality.

Theoretical perspectives

Naturalistic inquiries and experiments rest on different assumptions about the world. Whilst positivism asserts that there is an objective reality that can be measured, post-positivist paradigms, such as interpretivism and constructivism, emphasize a world of complexity, with no single truth to be discovered but a multitude of perspectives to be understood (Ellis et al., 2007; Jones & McBeth, 2010). Discovering causal relationships is the work of positivist research, whilst discovering causal mechanisms is the focus of interpretivists (Lin, 1998). Thus, studies of narrative persuasion, which seek generalizable cause-and-effect relationships between various features of a persuasive narrative message and measured changes in those exposed to it, are typically positioned in positivist

paradigms rather than interpretivist ones (Dahlstrom, 2021; Zyphur & Pierides, 2020). Indeed, interpretivism seems at odds with positivist experimental approaches, which typically attempt to remove the influence of social context altogether, something that interpretivism rejects as a possibility (Kantola, 2021). Nevertheless, Robinson and Mendelson (2012) emphasize that through a “qualitative experiment”, researchers are able to introduce interviewees to mediated stimuli and test their reactions in a contextual, reflective manner that illuminates the processing of meaning construction in a unique way – providing that this approach is taken without concern for the exact identifiable cause and effect relationships between the message and any change observed in the recipients of that message (Kantola, 2021). The present research is not an “experiment” in the positivist tradition, but rather a pilot study following the frame set out by this school, adapted from Robinson and Mendelson (2012). This research seeks to explore *how* narrative messages impact attitudes to land-based wind power developments, not *how much*. As such, constructivism offers an appropriate lens through which to consider conflicting interpretations of reality, such as different perceptions of – and reactions to – mediated content (Robinson & Mendelson, 2012). In this case, a narrative message in the form of a video prompt.

According to Jones and McBeth (2010), empirical research of narratives seeks to explain the ways that narratives impact individual public opinion, focusing on evaluating the persuasiveness of narratives on individuals. Narrative persuasion research is usually experimental in nature, whereby groups of participants are exposed to narratives that “portray characters experiencing some aspect of a larger phenomenon with a normatively positive or negative conclusion” (Dahlstrom, 2021, p. 4). Whilst Ellis (2015) explains that experimental methods are accepted as providing credible “proof” of outcomes produced by an intervention, Mercier (2020) notes that it can be hard to tell whether any phenomena observed in the lab will happen in the uncontrolled environment of real life. Indeed, Dahlstrom and Rosenthal (2018) contend that much of the persuasive power of narratives depends on the context in which audience members are exposed to them. The present research deviates from decontextualized, experimental forms in search of greater ecological validity, seeking qualitative insights of the experiences of relevant people, in real environments, within specific contexts (Zwarun & Hall, 2012). Such context has often been neglected in land-based wind power research (Ellis et al., 2007).

Jones and McBeth (2010) contend that post-positivists typically consider narratives as relative and therefore immune to generalization. Nevertheless, Willis (2007) argues that although interpretivist research is primarily focused on context-specific understandings, its findings may be generalized to the extent that subsequent research contexts are similar to the original study context. Findings from this research, then, may contribute to a broader understanding of motivations to support or oppose wind power developments in Norway.

Methods

This pilot study took the form of a “qualitative experiment,” adapted from Robinson and Mendelson (2012), combining aspects of naturalistic and experimental research. With a hybrid design consisting of multiple phases, interviewees received pre-test questions to gain insight into their existing knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs. They were then exposed to a video prompt (see DNT, 2020) produced and disseminated by DNT in opposition to land-based wind power development in Norway. The cinematic video features dramatic shots of wind turbines peppering Norwegian landscapes, discussion of the loss of Norwegian wilderness over the past century, and spokespeople from DNT talking about their experiences with the issue, calling the viewer – and politicians – to action. The video exhibits many elements of narrativity (Dahlstrom & Rosenthal, 2018; Norris et al., 2005), including: a narrator (DNT); a narratee (the viewer); events (the rise of land-based wind power); time (more than 100 years); agency (the Norwegian people rising up against land-based wind power); and purpose (saving Norwegian nature). There is also a clear messenger – DNT.

Finally, to gather qualitative insights relating to measures of transportation, identification, and emotion in response to the video, descriptive questions derived from common scale-based formats in the narrative persuasion field (Cohen, 2001; Davis, 1980; Green & Brock, 2002) were deployed during the post-test phase of the interviews. In this way, interviewees' interactions with the video prompt were "measured" to assess the extent to which they experienced phenomena associated with narrative persuasion. Data gathered from these phases was then integrated, allowing interviewees' contextualized answers to hold explanatory value to the pre- and post-test measures.

When conducting qualitative work in the constructivist paradigm, "trustworthiness" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is a term used to replace the likes of "validity" and "reliability" from the positivist paradigm (Cope, 2014). Trustworthiness is gained when researchers show that their data were ethically and mindfully collected, analysed, and reported (Carlson, 2010). This research does not seek to learn facts, rather it seeks interpretations of them and, as such, "validity" refers not to the data but to the inferences drawn from them (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Several validation processes were conducted to establish trustworthiness, including member checking (Cope, 2014), as well as triangulating interviewees' claims and timelines through analysis of documentation from the licensing process, social media and web content, and local and national news sources. The validity of the interpretation (Creswell et al., 2000) was developed by relying on multiple forms of evidence rather than a single incident or data point.

Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with the inclusion of the video prompt. Two additional semi-structured interviews without the video prompt were conducted with non-local actors, providing a broader perspective of Norway's land-based wind power debate. Interviewees included local politicians (n = 5) positioned for and against the development of Larvik wind farm, as well as the project developer (n = 1), a local opposition figure (n = 1), DNT representatives from both the central administration (n = 1) and the local chapter (n = 1), and a politician active at national scale (n = 1). Participants were selected for their role in the licensing process, local government, and local resistance, as evidenced by publicly-available documentation associated with the Larvik wind farm case, local news publications, and DNT-published content on the topic. They were recruited by phone, email, and/or SMS. All contact details were publicly available online. Purposive and snowball sampling strategies (O'Leary, 2017) were used to construct the sample for the interviews. Purposive sampling, through which the researcher intentionally selects the participants, was used to gather a sample that reflected the experiences of a range of elected officials at the local level (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019), whilst snowball sampling was used to ensure that the sample captured a wide range of different perspectives, as well as key sources of information, by asking interviewees to help identify others who might bring alternative views (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019), or who were considered to have played a key role in influencing the local debate about wind power development.

Those who were generally oppositional towards such development were clustered into Group A, whilst those who were generally supportive towards such development were clustered into Group B. Group A consisted of four males and two females. Group B consisted of three males and one female. Four of the six interviewees in Group A, and none of the interviewees in Group B, were members of DNT. Interviews lasted for between 30 and 75 minutes. The research was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), including the confirmation of the necessary consents. The informants are anonymized, and the associated data is not available due to risk of breaching the clause of anonymity.

Findings

Based on the interview transcripts, inductive thematic codes were developed. These emergent observational categories (Nygaard, 2017) were common themes including "Larvik as locals see it," "Norwegian connection to nature," and "Perceptions of Den Norske Turistforening".

Larvik as locals see it

Group A described Larvik as a wonderful place to live, with significance given to its proximity to beaches, woodland, and mountains, as well as notable nearby features including the Farris lake. Nature and nature-based activities were frequently drawn upon as key benefits of living in Larvik. Since, according to Clayton et al. (2016), place attachment and place identity stem from important connections to valued life settings, members of this group may have been more susceptible to messages highlighting threats to valued landscapes, such as those found in the video prompt. Larvik's natural surroundings, however, were also thought to be fueling a growth in tourism and the construction of large, expensive summer houses, described by interviewees as being exclusively for rich people from the Norwegian capital, Oslo, since locals couldn't afford such luxuries. This highlighted the perceived impact of outsiders on the local area.

Interviewees in Group B agreed that Larvik was a beautiful place, pointing to the fact that it had nature all around it. They emphasized that locals were very friendly, yet skepticism towards people from nearer Oslo was raised, echoing findings from Benjaminsen and Svarstad (2008) and Norgaard (2011) regarding a Norwegian tendency for negativity towards people from outside the immediate community. Interviewees in Group B noted that Larvik was quite old-fashioned and that a lot of people, particularly younger ones, were moving to cities like Oslo or Drammen.

Norwegian connection to nature

Interviewees conveyed how important unspoiled nature was to the Norwegian identity. Such "nature-nationalism" (described by Ween & Abram, 2012) sentiments were not surprising – the rugged Norwegian nature was imperative to the nation-building process culminating in national independence from Denmark in 1814 and Sweden in 1905, and has played a profound and symbolic role in Norwegian identity ever since (Christensen, 2002; Christensen, 2015; Eriksen, 1993; Slagstad, 2018).

Interviewees in Group A explained that the connection most Norwegians have to nature had come up in the land-based wind power debate, that it was a subject that went directly to the heart of Norwegians. Some interviewees' comments suggested that nature played a truly fundamental role in their senses of self. Of all the arguments against Larvik wind farm, they agreed, the main thing was the impact on nature.

Interviewees in Group B did not express the same attitude towards nature. They were not dismissive or irreverent of nature, clearly being passionate about it in their own way, but they did not exhibit the same deep connection to it as Group A. Rather, Group B labeled such attitudes as nature-Romanticism, and called them hypocritical. This suggests that messages appealing to nature-nationalism might be expected to have less success in engaging these interviewees.

Land-based wind power's impact on nature

Discussing land-based wind power's impact on nature, it was often difficult to identify whether interviewees were talking about Larvik wind farm specifically, or land-based wind power in general. Perceived evidence, anecdotes, and media relating to other cases (specific or undefined) were invoked as arguments for or against Larvik wind farm, without always offering a clear connection between the items provided and the local case itself.

Interviewees in Group A considered land-based wind power to have negative effects on the landscape and wildlife, exhibiting attitudes aligned with their close connections to nature. They frequently referred to the impact of wind turbines on animals, insects, and birds (especially birds of prey), referring to images or reports they had seen. One interviewee explained that places where wind farms were typically sited were where rarer species lived. Although none of the interviewees mentioned listed species in relation to the proposed site of Larvik wind farm, the topic was clearly

important to them and conveyed the impact that media was able to have on the attitudes of local stakeholders.

If I go out with a gun and shoot an eagle they'll put me in jail, but these windmills kill them daily.
(Group A, Interview 6).

The construction of infrastructure related to wind farms was another major concern, with interviewees in Group A lamenting the creation of roads to enable their construction. The presence of existing access roads at the Larvik site (associated with the nearby quarry) was not raised by the group. There were also fears about poison and plastic being left behind after the construction of wind turbines, and that the community's drinking water in the Farris lake may be affected, something raised by the Norwegian Food & Safety Authority during the consultation process. Turbines could even blow down or set on fire, interviewees claimed, and they wouldn't create any jobs.

The issues and impacts described by members of Group A were at the heart of the growing national sentiment against land-based wind power. One interviewee explained that politicians didn't dare to support land-based wind power anymore, including those involved in the Larvik wind farm licensing process, because it generated a lot of hatred against them.

Group B did not consider the potential impacts of wind power development in the same way and questioned claims about its negative impacts on biodiversity. They felt that the whole debate was based on emotions rather than facts. As one interviewee in Group B explained, the underlying purpose of land-based wind power was to mitigate climate change, which was responsible for loss of species in the first place:

It's not to destroy nature. It's to reduce emissions around the world so this problem doesn't get out of hand.
(Group B, Interview 1).

Nevertheless, interviewees in Group B reported that it wasn't their intention to have wind turbines erected everywhere, claiming they were not positive to wind power when it obviously destroyed valuable nature. They did not consider the Larvik site to be an example of this.

As the anti-wind power sentiment in Norway grew, those who continued to support it were put under increasing pressure. Indeed, as Mercier (2020) explains, once everyone in a community accepts a belief, voicing disagreement is often more trouble than it is worth. Members of Group B explained that there was so much negative news, almost every day, on TV or in the newspapers, that politicians were afraid to support wind power development. One interviewee added that they had received death threats for being a supporter.

Visual impacts of wind power

Visual impacts were mentioned in almost all interviews. Some interviewees in Group A explained that locals would likely see the visual effects as the most significant impact, with others concerned that the turbines would be visible from the center of town. Even so, one interviewee admitted to previously thinking turbines were beautiful, that in the past they had represented something other than destruction of nature. Others did not agree. Some interviewees in Group A stated that the opposition was not about the visual impacts. They seemed aware of the stigma associated with opposing wind power because of such impacts. Instead, they claimed their opposition was about reducing human impacts on nature, or other factors that were perceived to put the local population at risk, like ice being flung off the turbines, intrusive sounds, and other health-related issues.

As discussed, interviewees in Group B acknowledged that concerns about nature in relation to wind power development were important to consider, but they felt that the visual aspect was different. Group B explained their feeling that the opponents of wind power development were mostly concerned about the visual impact:

They don't like to look at it and they use all sorts of arguments that fit their needs. (Group B, Interview 1).

This statement echoes Pasqualetti (2011), who suggests that any possible impact will be accepted by oppositional voices if it can be used to slow or defeat the project. Group B felt that in the end, the visual impact was the biggest issue. They highlighted a perceived NIMBYism (see Devine-Wright, 2005) in opponents to Larvik wind farm (and the industry at large), claiming that although there was a lot of support for green energy, nobody wanted to see it being produced. Some interviewees in Group B also described wind turbines as beautiful and captivating. Others pointed to existing infrastructure, such as the local quarry, as justification for the development.

Change of heart about land-based wind power

Both groups explained that sentiments towards land-based wind power had shifted over recent years. Perceptions of the driving forces behind this shift, however, were inconsistent.

Interviewees in Group A explained that as recently as 2018, people were still positive to wind power development. In Larvik, this positivity had been reflected in the attitudes of local politicians when the Larvik wind farm license application had been submitted. There was a lot of support at the start, although interviewees admitted they didn't know a lot about it all back then. Regarding the change of heart that followed, some interviewees attributed it to rising concern about biodiversity loss raised by the likes of the 2019 IPBES report (IPBES, 2019). This research was perceived by some to align with – and provide scientific backing for – core messages from some of Norway's major nature and outdoor organizations, including DNT. Others explained that the change of heart was due to the publication of potential areas for siting wind power installations, associated with Norway's national framework for wind power development. This raised the salience of the perceived threat of such development for municipalities across the country. Accordingly, opposition began to mobilize against wind power development, both in Larvik and beyond, around this time. This marked a period where information from outside Larvik seemed to weigh heavily on the local conversation.

People started writing about it on social platforms, Facebook and things like that, they could tell us a lot about the poison that they have to use, the plastic they leave, and all these things.

(Group A, Interview 6).

Many of those who had been supporters of wind power in Larvik started fighting it. Some interviewees explained that their opinions had been swayed by loud and influential voices. Others noted that being seen to be in favor of such projects could now be extremely problematic, with supporters receiving considerable backlash. As a result, when people began to demonstrate and vocalize their opposition to wind power expansion in Norway, interviewees felt that politicians were reluctant to show support to the industry. There were few supporters left, they claimed.

Interviewees in Group B agreed that although the development plan in Larvik eventually met a lot of resistance, this wasn't the case at the beginning. There was little concern about wind power development until 2018, interviewees explained, but after DNT started screening short anti-wind power infomercials in cinemas on the west coast, this changed.

When DNT got involved, it got crazy, that's when it started.

(Group B, Interview 9).

Interviewees described how DNT had made use of the map of *potential* areas for siting wind power developments, presenting it as showing locations where such developments *would* be sited. Interviewees in Group B found this disingenuous, as it gave the impression that nowhere was safe from the threat of development, putting many municipalities on alert. After that, the negative press about wind power development began to spread. Interviewees explained that it became unavoidable, and before long, a large opposition had taken shape.

As national concern developed, the project in Larvik received a lot of negativity. Interviewees from both groups described the way that information from oppositional voices across Norway was drawn upon by influencers in Larvik, where soon there was no longer a debate to be had. Politicians, they agreed, became afraid to voice support for the project, or the industry at large.

Existing infrastructure

Despite some concern that Larvik wind farm could be the beginning of a larger rollout of turbines in the area, some interviewees in Group A were forthcoming about the fact that it wasn't a large or significant development. Yet when discussing the existing infrastructure, members of Group A seemed to latch on to common, more general oppositional themes (described in the section "Land-based wind power's impact on nature") rather than engaging with local factors such as the existing quarry and access routes. The existing infrastructure seemed to be irrelevant from the perspective of many members of Group A. Though one interviewee stated that the proposed site was not considered a popular place to hike:

It's not a touristic area, we don't go there.
(Group A, Interview 8).

This sentiment was corroborated by a statement submitted by the county environmental department as part of Larvik wind farm's consultation process, suggesting the development plan raised no direct conflict with areas of national importance for outdoor recreation.

Interviewees in Group B explained there were good wind conditions and existing infrastructure at the site. They highlighted that the forests around the area were managed for timber, rather than being old growth woodland, and that the location was not part of the beautiful Larvik countryside. One interviewee in Group B emphasized that the heaviest fighters for nature live in the cities, especially in Oslo, and that this was hypocritical of them.

Most of those people that say you damage the nature are the same people who are walking on the highest mountains in Norway and who drove on those roads to get up there, which were built when they were building dams and hydropower infrastructure. (Group B, Interview 5).

These statements suggest a perception that non-locals might play a role in influencing the local debate, blurring the lines between scales of geography and governance. Perhaps it was not simply that interviewees conflated the local impacts of wind power development and the collected national arguments, but rather that this was the reality of the debate.

With a quarry, a nearby motorway, a train line, and other man-made features, interviewees in Group B considered the site to be an industrial area well suited to the siting of a small wind power installation.

Alternatives to Larvik wind farm

Many alternative options to constructing Larvik wind farm were raised by interviewees in Group A, including the improvement of Norway's existing hydropower installations, the siting of wind turbines offshore, the use of nuclear energy sources, and reducing consumption in Norwegian society. Expansion of hydropower was seen by several interviewees as a way to avoid the need for land-based wind power development more broadly. Interviewees claimed that some of Norway's existing dams could be expanded with little additional impact on the environment. It was understood that there were parallels between land-based wind power development and the hydropower conflicts that had taken place in the past, in which DNT had also been involved.

More than any other suggestion from Group A, however, offshore wind power was highlighted as a way to satisfy to Norway's growing electricity needs whilst addressing their rejection of wind

power on land. Despite their apparent support for moving turbines offshore, however, several interviewees raised concerns about a proposed Swedish offshore wind farm that would be visible from Larvik. “Offshore,” then, was seemingly only acceptable to the extent that it was synonymous with “unseeable.”

Overall, members of Group A seemed aware that rising consumption was as much a cause of local changes as it was of global ones. There seemed to be a feeling that Norwegians, generally, were in denial about their role in climate change.

They are building turbines, it’s their fault. No, it’s all our fault. We are the ones using this energy.
(Group A, Interview 3).

Interviewees in Group B felt that most of the people who suggested expanding the hydropower didn’t understand the difference between expanding and upgrading existing installations. They argued that the potential of getting more electricity out of hydropower upgrades was next to nothing. Instead, to get more electricity out of the existing installations would require expanding them, at the cost of nearby nature.

But that’s their argument against windmills. It just doesn’t compute.
(Group B, Interview 1).

This issue was seen to moot arguments raised by Group A, seemingly just another example of the perceived asymmetrical debate going on between those who knew and those who didn’t.

Interviewees in Group B agreed that consumption was the main driver of land-use change in the area. Norwegians were described as using ten times more than they needed. Interviewees felt that if projects like Larvik wind farm were not going to be made possible, then the Norwegian way of life would have to change instead.

Perceptions of Den Norske Turistforening

Across both groups, most interviewees felt that DNT had a legitimate role to play in the debate about Norway’s land-based wind power and nearly all of them were already aware of DNT’s work on the topic. Nevertheless, the opinions that interviewees in each group had towards DNT, and particularly in response to the video prompt, were divided.

Interviewees reflected on the fact that *friluftsliv* was used strategically in building Norway as its own nation and cementing its own culture. They explained that DNT was a figurehead for such activity and represented something deep in the Norwegian national identity, rooted in nature-nationalism. It was one of the strongest brands in Norway and had a lot of influence:

They are a big organisation, they set the understanding of a lot of things.
(Interview 3).

Group A felt that DNT had done a good job in the land-based wind power debate and had been successful in getting people involved. One interviewee remembered that DNT had arranged a meeting in Larvik about a proposal for a different wind farm. Others explained they had been to DNT-led demonstrations in other parts of the county too. One interviewee expressed an opinion that DNT had gotten the ball rolling on the discussion about land-based wind development in Norway altogether, that work by DNT chapters on the west coast, in particular, had been important in bringing the debate to a wider audience. Other interviewees agreed that these west coast chapters had been particularly effective at rousing the opposition, that they had been very active for many years.

Devine-Wright and Howes (2010) explain that individuals with high levels of trust in a local opposition group likely have a stronger association between place attachment and negative attitudes to local wind farms. For Group A, DNT were well known, well liked, and trusted. As a result, they likely represented an ideal messenger for this audience with regard to disseminating anti-wind power messaging.

Interviewees in Group B also felt that DNT had been a significant voice in the debate, with a real ability to influence public opinion. They were considered to have played an important role in creating widespread conflict on the issue, with one interviewee claiming DNT had been the ones who started it all.

It's kind of the Norwegian soul, going on hikes in the mountains and all those things. So, everyone believes what they are saying because they have so much credibility.
(Group B, Interview 9).

Interviewees in Group B appreciated that DNT had a legitimate argument against wind power development and a natural part to play in the debate. Although those in Group B agreed that DNT had to look out for its members, interviewees felt that the organization couldn't talk for everyone. Some interviewees felt that, generally, DNT were viewed as a neutral or objective voice by the public, but that on the subject of land-based wind power, they hadn't been. Instead, interviewees in Group B agreed, DNT had been able to sell the idea that there was no more nature left in Norway. Considering DNT's perceived role as a representative of the Norwegian soul, and land-based wind power as perceived as an attack on Norwegian nature, when queried whether land-based wind power was therefore framed as an anti-Norwegian pursuit, several interviewees in Group B gave an emphatic "yes".

Processing persuasion

Findings from Gislason et al. (2021) emphasize that place-based communication with local people is most effective when it uses stories that speak to an audience's pre-existing values. Indeed, during exposure to the narrative message, members of Group A were seen to have rich, engaging experiences, likely because the video prompt resonated with their attitudes and beliefs. Those existing values, to a large extent, seemed to be rooted in nature-nationalism, revealed by interviewees as something they perceived in the heart of all Norwegians. Interviewees in Group A exhibited strong place-based connections to Norway, generally, as well as Larvik and the surrounding areas, more specifically. The culmination of these pre-existing attitudes and beliefs positioned DNT as an ideal messenger for Group A. In comparison to other potential messengers, such factors made DNT more effective than, for example, the site developer who had put himself forward as a source of information early in the licensing process, or the consultancy responsible for the minor impact assessment associated with the license application, who both represented outsiders with no name recognition. Indeed, members of Group A were forthcoming about their trust in DNT and highlighted the extent to which the organization represents the Norwegian national identity, with which most members of Group A aligned.

Through the lens of their pre-existing values, almost all of Group A experienced transportation, with some providing responses that hinted at their having experienced identification with characters portrayed in the video too. These phenomena were underscored by a wealth of emotional responses to the video prompt. In these rich conditions for the persuasive potential of the narrative to be met, interviewees' story-consistent beliefs (beliefs consistent with those represented in story they were being exposed to) were upheld, or even strengthened. Non-DNT members were drawn closer towards the organization, with one interviewee stating that they were going to sign up after the interview was finished. Meanwhile, interviewees who were already DNT members felt that when it came to the debate about land-based wind power, if this was DNT's position, they should feel the same. One interviewee, a self-confessed influencer of local opinion, wanted to share the video with other people, suggesting that in the right hands, a media message can quickly graduate from an object of indirect influence to the gold standard for persuasion: interpersonal communication (Dunwoody, 2007).

For Group B, despite the fact that several interviewees had been DNT members in the past, DNT did not represent an effective messenger. Members of Group B raised issues of perceived hypocrisy and shortsightedness that worked to undermine the credibility of this messenger and, as a result, formed the basis of counterarguments against the message (Moyer-Gusé & Dale, 2017). Evidently,

members of Group B held lesser story-consistent attitudes and beliefs to those of Group A and did not seem to experience transportation or identification in response to the video. For the most part, they formed counterarguments or disengaged from it.

Nevertheless, as discussed, persuasion is a process, and there was no expectation that the video prompt would bring about a U-turn in the established attitudes and beliefs of these interviewees. Rather, interviewees in Group B were not expected to make it through the whole video at all. Yet, on the whole, they did (albeit potentially only due to the presence of the researcher), and some even expressed empathetic sentiments towards DNT after exposure. It is not clear from the available data, however, whether these statements of appreciation for the legitimacy of DNT's position and the organization's argument against land-based wind power were held before the video prompt was shown, or if they were developed as a result of watching it.

In light of all interviewees' responses to the video prompt, some appreciation must be given to the fact that involvement with an issue strongly influences the strength of individuals' attitudes about that issue (Podgórecki et al., 1996). Interviewees were about as close as it is possible to get to the Norwegian land-based wind power debate. Furthermore, this conflict had taken place within a protracted national dispute in which their positions had been well established and their identities in relation to those positions likely built upon and reaffirmed over an extended period. As such, they were highly polarized on the subject. One has to wonder whether, as a result of this, they were so close to the heart of the conflict that they were not easily inched back. This research suggests, however, that they could still be inched forward.

Interviewees across both groups felt that DNT had played a significant role in Norway's debate about land-based wind power. By appealing to the Norwegian brand of nature-nationalism, and the vision many Norwegians have of being close to nature, DNT's messaging on the wind power debate, generally (not just in the video prompt), was considered to have great weight.

Discussion

This research explored how elected officials come to hear about proposed wind farm developments, whose knowledge and expertise they trust on the issue – as well as whose is discounted – and how this impacts the eventual perceptions that they adopt. The video prompt used in this study was released after Larvik municipality's decision had been made to reject the development of Larvik wind farm. It played no direct role in that decision. Instead, it offered the opportunity to investigate the persuasive influence of narrative messaging on both supportive and oppositional stakeholders in a land-based wind power licensing process in Norway, adding to the understanding of how local networks of influence can contribute to the outcomes of local governance (Devine-Wright, 2005; Toke et al., 2008; Wolsink, 2007).

In recent years, DNT has produced much more content about land-based wind power than the video used in this research. Considering that during environmental conflicts, the information people have access to plays a crucial role in how that conflict develops (Beckham Hooff et al., 2017), it might be valuable to consider what effect such an organization could have in a national-scale debate that centers around the topics and values on which it is founded, and on which much of the citizenry looks to them for guidance. Interviewees on both sides of the debate considered DNT as not only influential in amplifying oppositional sentiments, but as responsible for them in the first place. Thus, as per Ellis et al. (2007), having defined the narrative for many Norwegians, DNT emerged as a dominant party in the discourse about the acceptability of land-based wind power in Norway, continuing in a role defining the acceptable use of land that they have held for more than a century (Ween & Abram, 2012). DNT does not, therefore, appear to be a marginalized voice in such processes, as suggested by Inderberg et al. (2019).

The impact of DNT's media outreach was seen to take the form of an amplification of story-consistent beliefs and attitudes, leading several interviewees in Group A to vocalize their

compulsion to take action in response to the message, as well as their explicit recognition of being influenced by it.

I kind of agree with them. But mainly I did beforehand. But I do even stronger after looking at this video. I guess that's the intention of the video, of course. They succeeded with me.

(Group A, Interview 8).

For those opposed to Larvik wind farm, this pilot study worked like an artificial echo chamber, pushing them further towards their nearest pole of opinion. For supporters of land-based wind power development, however, the narrative message in the video prompt caused them to form counterarguments or disengage. These findings suggest that although processes of persuasion through media exposure are at work in Norway's land-based wind power debate, their role may be more rooted in the amplification of existing attitudes and beliefs, and the repulsion of audiences who hold values contrary to those expressed in a narrative message, rather than some direct, mind-changing ability. Ultimately, such processes were seen to contribute to the polarization of individuals on either side of the debate about the acceptability of land-based wind power in Norway.

When assessing the impact of media messages on the attitudes that elected officials hold with regards to wind power developments, a distinction arises between whose knowledge and expertise is trusted – and whose is discounted. In the case of this research, those who were able to assert their narrative into the public discourse – dominating the landscape of conflicting narratives regarding the level of impact likely to result from the construction of a local wind power development – were the ones the audience trusted and whose message resonated with (and was amplified through) that audiences' existing attitudes and beliefs. While the impact assessment conducted as part of the license application found that the construction of Larvik wind farm would have only minor implications, this expert knowledge was rejected in favor of an alternative view – the one championed by DNT.

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