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To cite this article: Mark Usher (2013) Defending and transcending local identity through environmental discourse, *Environmental Politics*, 22:5, 811-831, DOI: [10.1080/09644016.2013.765685](https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2013.765685)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2013.765685>



Published online: 26 Feb 2013.



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Defending and transcending local identity through environmental discourse

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Discourse analysis is employed to explore the discursive terrain of an environmental dispute concerning proposals for an opencast coalmine in West Yorkshire, England. Three dominant discourses are entangled in a framing contest over the nature of 'nature' as the consequential construction will have profound implications for the planning process and the people involved. The case study is particularly attentive to the notion of local identity, and how local actors employ strategic representations of nature to defend and transcend their sense of place. This is demonstrated by local opposition whereby the essentialism of nature and scale has been effectively challenged throughout the dispute. The study also elucidates the complex relationship between local and trans-local mobilisation, and how a form of grassroots *realpolitik* has enabled two protest groups to unite and advance an amalgamated discourse of opposition in order to achieve the common objective of keeping the coal underground.

Keywords: environmental discourse; planning; scale politics; place identity; NIMBY; Yorkshire; climate change

Introduction

Discourse affects how we perceive, interpret and experience being-in-the-world, thus shaping our comprehension of environmental issues and their associated problems and solutions (Hajer 1995, Dryzek 2005). Therefore, when divergent stakeholders become entangled in an environmental dispute it often acts as a touchpaper for an intense war of words and worldviews, and discursive fault lines become discernible. Discourse analysis has thrown up an array of concepts and methods that can be employed to identify the different discourses at work, reveal how they interact, and explore the implications for collaboration and conflict (Hajer and Versteeg 2005). It has also furthered our understanding of 'nature' as a contested concept (Soper 1995, Castree 2005), which is always 'discursively constructed through economic, political and cultural processes' (Macnaghten and Urry 1998, p. 95).

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Indeed, the articulation of discourse does not take place in a political vacuum; ecological truth claims invariably function to persuade rather than to inform (Dingler 2005, Alexander 2008). Conceptualisations of nature vary according to the social context in which they are made and in line with the utilitarian objectives of those who express them (Keulartz *et al.* 2004, Hunold and Leitner 2011). Environmental dialogue is over-determined by the discursive hegemony of environmental science which legitimises the interests of those who are able to mobilise it whilst rendering the arguments of those who cannot as 'subjective' or 'lay', and this becomes apparent in environmental planning disputes (Peace 1993, Rydin 2003, Pellizzoni 2011).

Where scientific knowledge is effectively mobilised by opposing sides in an environmental dispute, the discursive struggle can become largely shaped by the interweaving of other narratives in and around the scientific discourse, engaging discourses of democracy, community, family, economy and aestheticism *inter alia* (Sandberg and Foster 2005). During struggles over development proposals the 'environment' invariably acts as a discursive hook on which to hang a whole spectrum of alternative causes (Garavan 2007, Özen 2009, Voulvouli 2011). Accordingly, Ferree *et al.* (2002, p. 62) propose that the discursive 'field in which framing contests occur is full of hills and valleys, barriers, traps and impenetrable jungle' which 'provides advantages and disadvantages in an uneven way to the various contestants in framing contests', and therefore employ the notion of a 'discursive opportunity structure'.

However, whilst the universality of environmental science enables experts to wield its hegemonic power to negotiate and advocate development, local actors can draw upon more rooted sources of discursive influence pertaining to identity, place and community history (Dalby and Mackenzie 1997, Stratford 2009). Place attachment and identity appear to be inherently bound up with a person's evaluation of local projects and environmental degradation (Kaltenborn 1998, Dixon and Durrheim 2000, Vorkinn and Riese 2001, Devine-Wright 2009, Petrova *et al.* 2011), which will have significant bearing on a discursive struggle should one arise.

In their attempts to halt construction of a bridge between Sweden and Denmark, affected groups employed strategic representations of the environment to legitimise their actions and question development plans (Linnros and Hallin 2002). Local groups conveyed different constructs of nature, but all narratives coalesced around a 'discourse of resistance' (p. 394) to challenge a development discourse strongly supported by external advocates. Similarly, in North Mayo, Ireland, Garavan (2007, p. 854) found that local actors motivated by the need to defend their sense of place from a proposed natural gas refinery combined an array of concerns to create a 'hybrid discourse of dissent and opposition' that was continually and strategically reframed. Although constructions of nature were central to the local struggle, environmental discourse was by no means exclusive; rather, environmental issues were 'integrally bound up with complementary discourses of family, community, health and physical locality' (Garavan

2007, p. 854), and these different components were selectively prioritised depending on the discursive opportunity structure.

Whilst there is a growing consensus in the environmental politics literature that 'NIMBY' (not-in-my-backyard) is a reductive and pejorative label that black-boxes a complex, heterogeneous array of local and *universal* concerns (Ellis 2004, Gibson 2005, Garavan 2007, Wolsink 2007, Devine-Wright 2009), local actors continue to 'jump' (Smith 1993, Swyngedouw 1997) and politicise geographical scale in order to transcend the local milieu and avoid possible accusations of NIMBYism (Drury *et al.* 2003, della Porta and Piazza 2007, Rootes 2007, Özen 2009). Scale has become a key site of discursive contestation in environmental conflicts as it provides a platform for local protestors to gain broader support by linking their campaign to regional, national or even global movements, thus serving to shift the focus from the fate of the local town to the state of the global environment. The success of grassroots struggle can hinge on the capacity of protestors to simultaneously defend *and* transcend local conceptualisations of identity through the continued scaling up and down of campaign objectives. However, effective bridging between local contention and geographically wider struggles is rarely straightforward or forthcoming, evidenced by the relative paucity of examples in the environmental politics literature (Boudet 2011).

Mobilising and substantiating insights from the discourse and framing literature on environmental planning conflicts, I explore how stakeholders involved in a dispute over proposals for an opencast coalmine in West Yorkshire interpret the planned development and frame their course of action. Through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders and a comprehensive analysis of documents and websites, the three main discourses are identified and organised into a typology. I then turn to power relations between the discourses and the framing strategies employed, particularly focusing on the significance of local identity and how community actors exploit strategic representations of nature and activist networks to defend and transcend their sense of place.

Contesting an opencast coalmine in West Yorkshire, England

In December 2006, Banks Developments submitted to Leeds City Council proposals for a new opencast coalmine. Despite national energy policy being generally unfavourable to opencast development for the past decade, Banks was confident of success given that they had operated and restored more than 100 surface mines, including 18 in Yorkshire, and had over 130 successful planning permissions in the last 15 years. Moreover, with a recent resurgence in coal prices and plans for developing carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology in Yorkshire, there are hints of an industry revival in the region (Drake 2009).

The application was for a 137-hectare site to be located within the greenbelt area of Leeds, to the east of Ledston village, and adjacent to the Fairburn Ings Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) nature reserve. If the project

had received the go-ahead, approximately 875,000 tonnes of coal and 200,000 tonnes of dimension stone would have been mined from a depth of 63 metres, operating six days a week over five years, with an average five coal lorries per hour leaving the site. Although Banks affirmed that they could work the site in an environmentally acceptable way and minimise disruption to surrounding communities, various groups and individuals sprang up in protest to the proposed plans motivated by different concerns, including Residents Against Greenbelt Exploitation (RAGE), Yorkshire Against New Coal (YANC), local recreational groups and Parish Councils, local members of parliament (MPs) and councillors, Leeds Friends of the Earth (LFoE) and Leeds Stop Climate Chaos (LSCC). Leeds City Council claim to have received 1635 letters of objection from members of the public, mostly from people residing in nearby villages (LCC 2009).

In early 2009, the groups coalesced for a protest walk around the proposed site, with over 200 people attending to voice their concerns about the nature reserve, climate change, infrastructural stress, pollution and threats to health, leisure, amenities and the local economy. In addition, the groups adopted various methods of objection including internet campaigns, public protests at Fairburn Ings nature reserve and in Leeds city centre, distribution of leaflets and newsletters, liaised with local newspapers, radio stations and parish council magazines, wrote letters of objection to politicians and organised bike rides to promote the campaign. However, the dispute was largely shaped by institutionalised opposition through attendance at planning meetings and submission of objections to the planning committee. To support the proposals, Banks regularly updated their website and released brochures outlining their environmental and community policies, attended planning meetings and organised public exhibitions in which the community could ask questions and give feedback.

In June 2009, after two hours of deliberation, the Plans Panel of Leeds City Council unexpectedly rejected the application despite planning officers' recommendations that the development be approved. The committee reached this decision on hearing representations from RAGE and Banks' director of planning. Banks subsequently lodged an appeal in January 2010 taking the dispute to a public inquiry in May 2010. The appeal was finally dismissed by the Secretary of State six months later on the grounds that the resulting landform would be overly 'imposing and unnatural' and would 'fail to retain attractive landscapes', and that the very special circumstances necessary for development on greenbelt did not exist (DCLG 2010, p. 3).

The outcome of the planning dispute evidently hinged to some great extent on the perceived nature of 'nature', and how this was largely determined by the conceived character of the development itself: would it enhance or compromise the existing landscape? Could it complement the natural harmony between the village aesthetic and surrounding pastures? What effect would it have on the adjacent nature reserve, and indeed, global climate change, and could this be managed in an environmentally acceptable way? I identify three dominant

discourses that stakeholders would regularly draw upon to frame their personal interests and obligations in the planning decision; these will be outlined in the subsequent section after their methodological basis has first been elucidated.

Whilst discourse is emphatically embedded in the material world and is constitutive of actual human practice, its social endurance depends on documentation; therefore its existence is principally textual. Accordingly, the units of analysis required for this case study are texts. Publically available documents provide a broad base of evidence from which to codify the typology of discourses, of which official planning texts have been particularly important. This includes the original planning application and Environmental Management Plan submitted by Banks, The Report of the Chief Planning Officer for Leeds City Council, Banks' letter of appeal, the Inspector's Recommendation on behalf of the Secretary of State that rejected the appeal, letters of conditional approval from the Coal Authority, Environment Agency, English Heritage, Highways Agency, Natural England, North Yorkshire County Council, Yorkshire Water and RSPB, and letters of objection from Ledsham Parish Council, Kippax Parish Council, Fairburn Parish Council and Ramblers' Association. Eleven local newspaper articles were analysed, three newsletters from RAGE and LFoE, and seven brochures released by Banks. The websites of RAGE, YANC, LFoE and Banks were also analysed and regularly checked for updates.

To augment the document analysis and garner a more personalised account of the dispute, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 90 minutes were conducted with 10 key stakeholders: five environmental activists (#1 to #5), three RAGE members (#6 to #8), a city councillor (#9) and a Banks representative (#10). Transcripts were produced from audio recordings to facilitate textual analysis. As I was specifically interested in examining organisational dynamics in relation to environmental discourse, participants were approached through their affiliation with the various groups that had publically stated involvement. Interview questions concentrated on personal commitment to the cause, account of the planning dispute to date, objectives and strategy, environmental values, associated difficulties of participating in the process, and attitudes towards the other organisations involved.

Thematic discourse analysis (TDA) is employed, which 'identifies patterns (themes, stories) within data, and theorises language as constitutive of meaning and meaning as social' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 81). This is distinct from the more linguistically orientated forms of discourse analysis because I seek to identify prevalent discourses within a large body of data, where the analysis of abstract properties of language is neither feasible nor required. To organise the resulting themes (discourses) and sub-themes (storylines), thematic networks are employed which make for methodical analysis and provide a visual representation of the discursive field (Attride-Stirling 2001). There are three stages of textual analysis involved in TDA. The first is a largely descriptive process where rhetorical patterns and key concepts are coded in order to identify storylines, which in turn constitute the overarching discourse. The second stage

involves interpreting the general motivation and purpose of a text to ascertain its underlying function. The third stage analyses relations between texts and how they play off against each other, exploring their broader significance within the discursive struggle (Fairclough 2003).

The three dominant discourses

Custodial communitarianism

Custodial communitarianism is a discourse of local resistance formed in defensive response to an external threat, where the needs and deeds of the local community occupy the discursive core. The principal adherent to this discourse is RAGE, a local opposition group which had an active committee of eight members that regularly organised community meetings. In addition to media engagement and public protest, the group raised over £30,000 to employ technical experts to challenge Banks' environmental assessments. Additionally, local parish councils, city councillors and independent members of the community have written letters of objection to the planning board citing analogous concerns to those of RAGE. Throughout the campaign journalists writing for regional newspapers reinforced and amplified this discourse of opposition, emphasising the local character of the campaign, the 'bravery' and 'doggedness' of protestors, whilst providing an effective mouthpiece for RAGE, YANC and councillors (Yorkshire Post 2009, Yorkshire Evening Post 2009a).

The custodial communitarian discourse comprises four storylines that adherent actors routinely draw upon to protest Banks' opencast application (Figure 1), where the rhetorical devices employed are unsurprisingly emotive and moralistic. Portraying the villages as a 'peaceful haven' and environmental 'oasis' in an urban jungle, the '*community is a place of tranquillity and must be protected*' storyline is predominantly concerned with an overwhelmingly gloomy cost-benefit analysis of developments for local residents. Areas of concern include materialist issues of infrastructural capacity, the local economy and its supported livelihoods, but the greater emphasis is placed on more qualitative matters of recreational disruption, family values and health.

The '*Fairburn Ings is environmentally exceptional and needs to be preserved*' storyline defines the affected landscape as unique as it is designated greenbelt and a site of special scientific interest (SSSI), which principally refers to the nature reserve but also to surrounding fields. The contested nature of 'nature' has been at the heart of the discursive struggle and, since Banks first submitted their application, strategic representations of the environmental status of the site had been pursued by oppositional actors. The discourse represents nature as educational, edifying and consoling, and therefore uniquely precious to local residents and visiting tourists. The existing countryside is regarded as 'natural' yet domesticated for human enjoyment, where sizeable interference could upset this harmony and result in unwanted side effects, turning a 'natural beauty spot' into an 'unnatural landform'.

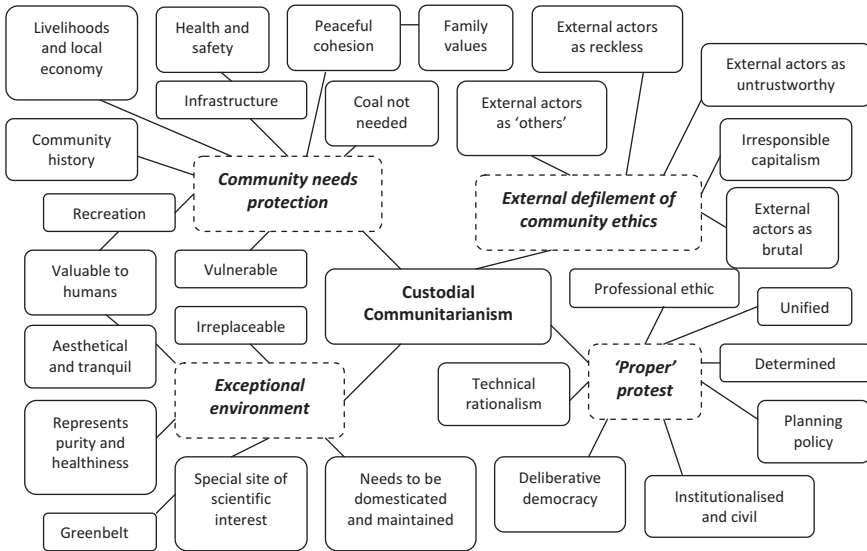


Figure 1. Custodial communitarianism **discourse** and *storylines*.

The manageability of nature is downplayed so as to counter Banks’ utilitarian representation that legitimises the opencast proposals, which according to RAGE demonstrates that the company is ‘environmentally unconscious’ (RAGE#6). Conversely, custodial communitarianism accentuates the environmental exceptionality and therefore irreplaceability of Fairburn Ings nature reserve, where the surrounding arable area that would be immediately affected by the development is strategically blended into this representation of nature: ‘the area is a special landscape area ... it’s not a common, whatever a common piece of landscape is, it is not’ (LCC#9). The crucial distinction was nevertheless made between the nature reserve and the proposed site during the planning process, therefore it was envisioned that the development could potentially produce considerable benefits for the area (LCC 2009). However, the Ramblers’ Association believed this to be based on a ‘totally artificial attempt to separate off’ the site from Fairburn Ings.

The ‘*irresponsible intruders will defile the community*’ storyline posits that Fairburn Ings will be ‘smashed’ and ‘obliterated’ by outsiders and the community’s ethics violated. The community perceive themselves as custodians of the countryside rising up against its ‘desecration’ by Banks, a word evoking biblical connotations of the fall and corruption of the natural world by human folly. To resist this defilement of its moral and peaceful community, the ‘*protest should be legitimate and proper*’ storyline portrays local opposition as courageous and civil in the face of adversity.

Global survivalism

Dryzek's (2005) description of the 'survivalism' discourse in world environmental politics appears to be consistent at the local level, as many stakeholders involved in the dispute adopt analogous assumptions, motives and rhetorical patterns. According to Dryzek, the central message of survivalism speculates that natural limits are being breached by the human population, largely due to unsustainable industrial activity. As this study is focused on a particular locality, the term 'global' is added to emphasise the cosmopolitan outlook of its adherents, where climate change is situated at the discursive core. Stakeholders that advance this discourse are generally from outside of the affected area, with YANC being its most prominent adherent. To halt Banks' planning application, YANC submitted 1100 letters of objection to Leeds' planning office, regularly attended planning meetings, sought media exposure and raised public awareness through demonstrations. However, other environmental groups and activists, including LFoE, LSCC and Tidal, opposed the developments based on global survivalism.

Whereas locals focused on the insufficiency of environmental restoration plans, trans-local actors communicating through global survivalism questioned Banks' unflinching faith in ecological modernisation and its representation of 'manageable' and 'productive' nature, which remains perilously blind to global climate change. The chief planning officer attempted to address this accusation in his report by claiming 'the carbon footprint of locally sourced fuel compared to that sourced internationally is significantly smaller' (LCC 2009, bullet 11.6), but those at whom it was aimed remained unconvinced. Whereas it might be possible for Banks to allay local residents' concerns through better environmental management, adherents to global survivalism will remain steadfast in their opposition based on contrasting fundamental assumptions regarding the natural world:

I'm opposed to all new coalmines wherever they are. So, making things that have nicer landscaping or sorting out the infrastructure involved in this or something like that is not an appropriate step as far as I'm concerned ... so if you don't mitigate climate change all your sites of special scientific interest are meaningless anyway. (EA#4)

Four constituent storylines emanate from the discursive core of global survivalism (Figure 2). The '*Banks' developments will contribute towards climate change*' storyline links Banks' proposals with climatic catastrophe on an unimaginably monumental scale. A sustainable society will necessitate concerted effort and abstinence, which Leeds City Council can pioneer through 'decisive leadership' by rejecting Banks' application. Tied in with this narrative is the '*Banks' industry is pernicious and archaic*' storyline, which focuses more on the coal industry as a whole rather than Banks per se. Coal is discursively constructed as 'dirty', 'ugly', 'anti-social' and old-fashioned as it belongs in the 'nineteenth century'. Similarly, the coal industry is portrayed as 'authoritarian', 'totalitarian' and 'hierarchical'. The global survivalism discourse is

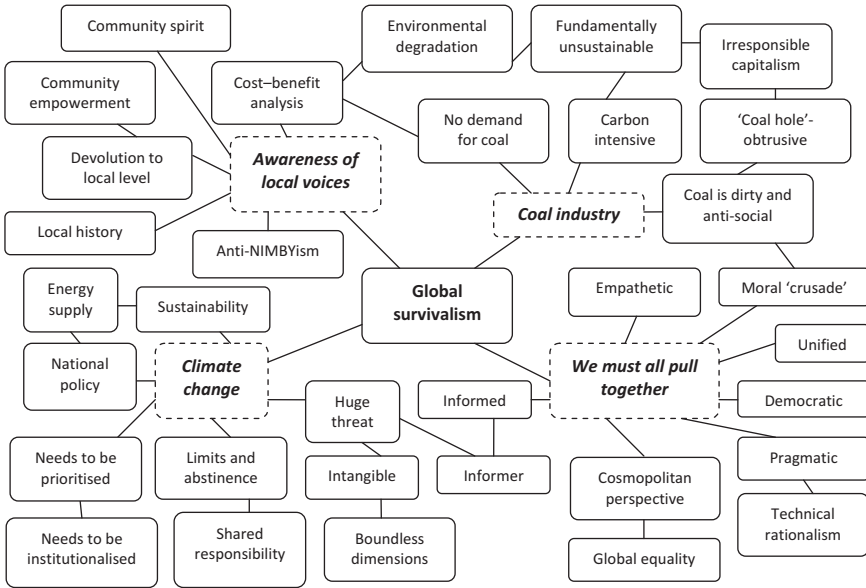


Figure 2. Global survivalism **discourse** and *storylines*.

uncompromising in its opposition to Banks’ proposals as their industry is fundamentally unsustainable.

The ‘*it’s important to listen to local voices*’ storyline emphasises community contact and the value of local perspectives, particularly where Fairburn Ings nature reserve is concerned. This component of global survivalism anchors a distinctly cosmopolitan campaign in tangible, solid terrain. Echoing Dryzek’s (2005) identification of a ‘green radicalism’ discourse that rejects the basic structure of industrial society, notions of ‘decentralisation’, ‘community empowerment’ and ‘local resilience’ have been sounded, where a member of LFoE pointed to the social benefits of an ‘anarchist commune’ (EA#2). In contrast, the ‘*we must all pull together for the collective good*’ storyline is cosmopolitan and perceptive to universal issues such as global equality. Whilst collaboration between pro-mine actors is represented as collusive and unsavoury, cooperation between anti-mine actors is approvingly portrayed as unified, empathetic and democratic in achieving an ‘ultimate purpose’.

Responsible resourcism

Resourcism refers to the professionalised management of extractive reserves, which downplays the intrinsic value of nature in favour of its instrumental worth. Multi-stakeholder engagement and environmental management can produce win-win scenarios for both development and sustainability, where improved

landscapes can take root as a result. So whereas custodial communitarianism is based on maintaining the status quo, and global survivalism emphasises natural limits and abstinence, responsible resourcism discursively depicts a more ‘positive’ perspective of a cornucopian society. Optimistic words such as ‘benefits’, ‘opportunities’, ‘expectations’ and ‘progress’ are regularly employed, and principles of corporate social responsibility (CSR) lie at the discursive core.

Some interesting bedfellows converge around this discourse who all assume Banks to be capable of successfully managing the site in an environmentally and socially acceptable way if specific conditions are met (Figure 3). Banks is the primary endorser of responsible resourcism but organisations that submitted conditional approval letters, cited above, adhere to its key assumptions and motives. The ‘*Banks can develop responsibly through effective environmental management*’ storyline invokes the macro-level environmental discourses of sustainable development and ecological modernisation identified by Dryzek (2005). This storyline revolves around the necessity for environmental management, and how methods of technical rationalism can effectively control nature.

Banks appeared to be more than capable of fighting their discursive corner on environmental terrain through an imaginary of ‘manageable nature’. Indeed, environmental management and sustainability is at the forefront of Banks’ ‘Development With Care’ policy, where nature is represented as *informative*, in that it can be interpreted by experts and effectively controlled for ecological and human security, and *productive*, as its principal function is considered to be as a supplier of energy and raw materials (Keulartz *et al.* 2004). Moreover, the

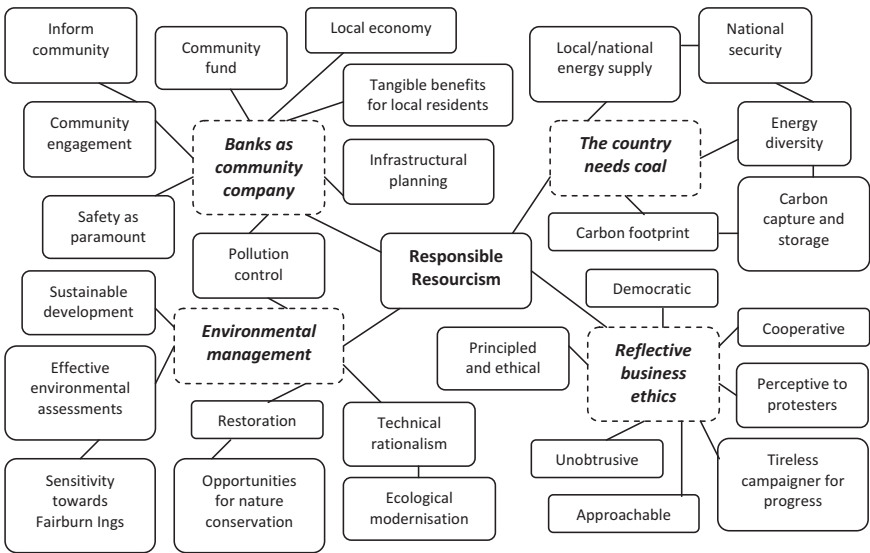


Figure 3. Responsible resourcism **discourse** and *storylines*.

discourse advanced by Banks assumes that environmental management can actually be ‘a clever way to conduct business’ and thus overcome ‘competition’ to ‘stay ahead of the game’ (BK#10).

A central condition of Banks’ proposals for effective environmental management included a 10-year restoration plan that would return the site to its existing agricultural landform on cessation of mining activity. The plan would also provide new features including increased hedgerows, conservation area, water bodies, and a buffer zone that would ensure protection of the adjacent nature reserve (LCC 2009). The restoration plan is revealing as it acts as a litmus test for environmental values. According to the pro-mine discourse of responsible resourcism, nature is replaceable and reproducible; it is essentially a blank canvas for human inventiveness to define and develop. Allusion to more qualitatively intrinsic constructions of nature would negate development prospects, and were therefore deemphasised in restoration proposals.

In addition to environmental measures, community initiatives make up the other half of Banks’ two-pronged approach to CSR. The ‘*Banks can be a community company*’ storyline emphasises the efficacy of community engagement for addressing local concerns of health, livelihood and infrastructure. The ‘*country needs coal to keep the lights on*’ storyline appeals for ‘common sense’ and ‘realism’, which seeks to justify, and to some extent normalise, the use of coal in terms of national security. Moreover, Banks interlink this storyline with sustainable development to propose that coal can actually reduce the nation’s carbon footprint if sourced locally rather than imported, especially if CCS technology becomes available in the future. Finally, the ‘*Banks can be a moral company with a human face*’ storyline is interwoven throughout, where Banks is portrayed as a principled and approachable company that will cooperate with protesters in the pursuit of environmental and social justice.

Discussion

Technical rationalism and the planning process

Through attendance at planning meetings, RAGE concentrated on institutionalised opposition as a legitimate and effective form of demonstration as the planning process is the discursive arena where the outcome is ultimately decided. However, to participate convincingly in the planning process, RAGE had to adapt its campaign to the planning protocol by adopting a professionalised lexicon:

When you go to the planning meeting ... it’s got to be totally on planning, you can’t bring your emotional points of view into it ... you’re limited to what you can put forward with planning. But you can see what we are up against. (RAGE#7)

To get it where it is and to get a refusal by the council, we had to tread very rigidly and strictly to planning and technical objections, not emotive ones. Because they don’t count for nothing. (RAGE#6)

Ferree et al.'s (2002) notion of a 'discursive opportunity structure' applies here, as the planning process distributes advantages and disadvantages unevenly across the discursive field, where custodial communitarianism with a significant emotional investment in the outcome was severely restricted and Banks benefited as a result. Similarly, those communicating through global survivalism struggled to communicate their concerns during the planning process as climate change has not received the attention it perhaps deserves in the planning process, and therefore does not lend itself to institutionalised demonstration:

Our planning system again is a huge problem because at the moment you can't really use carbon emissions as a reason to turn down a planning application, it has to be something like, it's spoiled someone's view, or it has resulted in more traffic. (EA#2)

Another activist complained that it is 'practically impossible to affect the planning process' because it is so time consuming to contribute, and when she has participated the dialogue is 'too narrow and specific' to include the issue of climate change which inevitably gets 'bogged down' in localised details or receives 'token mentions' (EA#3).

Evidently, the planning process and the technical rationalism discourse that supports it may appear to be reasonable, but it certainly is not impartial. Planning bureaucrats had the power to determine the nature of nature (manageable nature), and they also determined how this ought to be determined (technical rationalism). Through expensive environmental assessments and technical experts, Banks were in a position to exploit the technical rationalism discourse and compete more effectively due to the political and financial capital that, as a national company, is readily available. This is what Dryzek (2005, p. 9) alludes to when he remarks 'discourses are bound up with political power'. Specifically in terms of environmental planning, Rydin (2003, p. 4) reached a similar conclusion that the 'rationality of the policy process is shown to be an illusion, a cloak for the operation of power'.

However, Banks' application was nevertheless rejected. RAGE, and to some extent YANC, provided persuasive arguments against the proposed developments also based on the technical rationalism discourse. Whereas Peace (1993, p. 196) demonstrated how local oppositional voices in Cork were disregarded as 'subjective' and were subsequently suppressed by a 'scientific discourse' exercised by corporate technicians and state 'bureaucratic power' (p. 195), RAGE acquired the means to deploy expert authority through intensive fundraising. Essentially, RAGE was able to fight science with science. By hiring technical experts to translate 'informative nature' intelligible to ordinary citizens, and preferable to oppositional actors, RAGE wielded the discursive hegemony of environmental science and held its weight in the privileged discursive arena of the planning process. RAGE members certainly appear to have had this in mind when appointing experts:

we have engaged consultant hydrologists to say that there's a risk that the water will percolate through the alluvial deposits into the excavation. (RAGE#6)

I don't think Banks grasped what they were up against, and they thought they'd just bulldoze it through, 'oh they won't bother, they'll sign a few petitions and that'll be it', that we'd be organised enough to raise the money £30,000, to get the experts to fight them, I don't think they realised that. (RAGE#7)

Indeed, it would certainly appear that money can buy knowledge and knowledge can in turn draw power, for if RAGE had not generated the required funds for expert evaluation they would not have been able to reveal the 'truth' about the landscape. Therefore if nature is a pre-social objective reality, it is surprising that two expert technicians have observed the same landscape and reached contrasting conclusions, and moreover, they have drawn conclusions that are coincidentally desirable to their respective employers. The essentialism of nature and science's claim to neutrality is called into question in this circumstance, and corroborates what some have heralded as the politicisation of environmental science (Pellizzoni 2011). Yet as alternative discourses are based on different values and are mobilised by diverse actors, technical rationalism usually prevails as ostensibly impartial, objective grounds for contention.

Local identity and environmental imaginaries

As Sandberg and Foster (2005) demonstrated with the lawn care debate in Canada, the manner in which non-environmental discourses are strategically interwoven into the discursive field can help determine the outcome of the dispute. This was certainly the case here, where anti-mine actors opposed Banks' proposals by discursively interlinking environmental concerns with a diverse range of normative discourses relating to health, family, community, education, democracy and morality. Demonstrative of this, custodial communitarianism linked the proposed developments to the moral decay of children:

So the kids are going to be thrown out onto the streets, literally. The pubs now, are outside smoking, so the kids are congregating around public houses, so they're introduced to smoking, drinking and drugs, and that's, you know, and my concern with that is there's no leisure facilities if they take this out of the way because we have horse riding, we have cycling, we have fishing, we have bird watching, and it's all been centred around Fairburn Ings. (RAGE#7)

The discourse blends environmental imaginaries with the notion of community rights and values, which implies that defilement of Fairburn Ings is equal to the erosion of human morality. The environment acted as a discursive hook or 'empty signifier' (Özen 2009) on which to hang other discourses of opposition, therefore how nature is represented is of great symbolic significance. This lends support to the conclusions of Garavan (2007, p. 856), that environmental

discourses are usually employed as an ‘explanatory background’ for wider discourses of place and community, where ‘the environment becomes a symbol through which shared meanings of a much more general social character ... are expressed and promoted’ (Voulvouli 2011, p. 869). The notion of local identity has been central to the effective development of the custodial communitarianism discourse, where the affected villages have been discursively portrayed as one community that is harmonious and havened from surrounding areas. Corroborating what existing literature has established (Dalby and Mackenzie 1997, Garavan 2007), incoming development and environmental threat has facilitated a heightened awareness of place-belongingness and community togetherness, forged during fortnightly fundraising events and regular campaign meetings:

It’s been a remarkable exercise, and I must say I’ve enjoyed it very much. There’s been three villages involved ... but it’s brought the community together ... galvanising the community together over a common cause. (RAGE#6)

Of course, RAGE could be expected to give the impression of a united front in these circumstances. However, the councillor was also aware of a congealing sentiment of communion within the local population which provided him his democratic mandate, as was the Banks representative who, after encountering this phenomenon of local galvanisation in previous planning disputes, considered this to be a predictable outcome. Banks acknowledge that when an application is submitted it creates opportunities for communities to engage with one another, discuss relevancies of the proposals and formulate objections; it inadvertently opens up space for social capital to crystallise and identity boundaries to form.

Whilst Banks remain adamant that local opposition was not significant enough to challenge the case for development, RAGE insist that cynical tactics were used to undermine community cohesion. Mainly, RAGE accuse Banks of using the compensatory Community Fund as a bargaining tool to break deals with local groups such as the angling club, who were promised better facilities if they rescinded objections. According to one RAGE member, these interventions served to ‘get people separated’ within the community (RAGE#7). In response, custodial communitarianism discursively spatialised the villages as one community, therefore a dualistic, Manichean distinction between local residents and external actors facilitated a binary morality of ‘us’ and ‘them’. This dual distinction proved to be crucial in mobilising local opposition, as it has in past development conflicts (della Porta and Piazza 2007). Effectively, residents could only be with or against Banks, therefore the potential for compromising individuals in the community was much diminished. As one RAGE member put it, ‘So no, we haven’t heard of anybody who’s against us, who’s on Banks’ side’ (RAGE#8).

Furthermore, unlike the responsible resourcism and global survivalism discourses, custodial communitarianism is historically bound to the landscape, and

as Dalby and Mackenzie (1997) and Stratford (2009) have demonstrated, community history becomes a key resource in environmental conflicts that can be called upon when creating responsive identity boundaries:

It's almost sticking two fingers up at the local people who did work in the mining industry ... I think in terms of the local community, it was a very negative factor as well and a lot of people raise that. (LCC#9)

I've spent 40 years, working parts of the weekend planting trees and making Fairburn Ings what it is today. And I'm not going to sit back lightly and have somebody to come and make a few bucks to rip it all up again and smash it up. So I'm going to fight for it. (RAGE#6)

Comments such as these elucidate the profound connection between sense of self and place that is cemented over time, and demonstrate that the discursive construction of external 'others' is not solely strategic but is an impulsive response to protect an historical bond with the area. Whilst this supports the convincing consensus in the environmental politics literature that simplistic notions of NIMBYism black-box a complex and changeable phenomenon, local actors still employed various discursive mechanisms to avoid NIMBY charges being brought against them. The vulnerability of village life was regularly emphasised by RAGE as were the democratic credentials of the campaign, but the most effective strategy was to transcend localism by linking with the global survivalism discourse, where they realised that 'you've got to open it out from a parochial thing then they can't say it is NIMBYs, it's not, you know, that's not it' (RAGE#8).

'Jumping scales' to avoid NIMBY accusations

As external 'others', YANC and other environmental groups adhering to the global survivalism discourse were initially regarded as a threat by RAGE members, as they may have introduced 'bad things' (RAGE#8) into the community in the form of direct action rather than 'proper' protest. However, following sustained contact and a successful joint rally at the proposed site, RAGE extended their identity boundaries and welcomed YANC into the 'us' component of their binary morality, thereby creating a 'new sense of we-ness' (Drury et al. 2003, p. 205). Accordingly, the local campaign for the preservation of Fairburn Ings became discursively linked to the struggle against global climate change, and a stronger and broader discourse of opposition emerged as a result:

RAGE were not campaigning on climate change when I approached them to let the group know we were supportive but were campaigning from a different angle. At the rally, the RAGE spokesperson included the message of climate change and also was able to speak about the issue when making a presentation to Councillors at the determination meeting. (EA#1)

Then we've gone sort of global. (RAGE#8)

The relationship between RAGE and YANC was ‘more symbolic than institutional’ (EA#3) and based on pragmatism rather than mutual values, indicative of a form of grassroots realpolitik. To challenge the application effectively, the opposition groups pooled their social, political and financial capital to assemble a campaign that could counter Banks’ corporate machine. Whereas RAGE’s strategy had hitherto been decidedly insular with a formal and static organisational structure of approximately eight members, the alliance with YANC was absolutely instrumental in broadening their campaign horizon and boosting ‘bodies and banners’ at the protest march (RAGE#6). According to YANC’s spokesperson, their organisation has no ‘formal structure’ (EA#1) whose membership frequently fluctuates and therefore it resembles something of a fluid network.

It was through this network that other environmental groups and individual activists operating in the region came to be involved in the localised dispute over Fairburn Ings, who were effectively wound in via ‘crossed networks, connections and links’ (EA#3). There had been no previous contact between YANC and other environmental groups such as LFoE and TIDAL, but owing to activist networks they linked up with YANC and ‘publicised up’ the campaign and offered to provide ‘manpower’ if required (EA#5). Another activist with no formal ties with YANC volunteered to put up their posters around the University of Leeds campus, and like that of other activists subsequently learnt of RAGE’s local campaign:

From what I’ve heard RAGE’s perspective is focused on the impact that the coalmine will have on their local community but they also take into account wider issues of climate change, and they’re very aware of these issues, they’re not just parochial NIMBYs. (EA#4)

However, as the custodial communitarianism and global survivalism discourses are based on contrasting assumptions about nature, and have distinct priorities regarding their discursive cores of community and climate change respectively, there were fundamental differences that had been set aside as both share a common purpose. Firstly, RAGE was protesting against one particular coalmine based on localised issues, whereas YANC was protesting against what Banks represents – the coal industry. This distinction is well demonstrated by YANC’s strategic decision to focus exclusively on the ‘climate change dimension’ (EA#1) to avoid being embroiled in local rumours regarding collusion between Banks, RSPB and the trustees of a manor and its estate. Secondly, whereas the environmental exceptionality of the proposed site has been central to the RAGE campaign, oppositional allies adhering to global survivalism have questioned this motive:

That sort of distinction between greenfield and brownfield is a bit false in some ways, because I walked around the site and it’s farmland, and that’s not natural farmland by any sense, that’s industrial, agricultural land ... it’s a long way from anything that’s ecologically sustainable. (EA#2)

However, most significantly, whilst RAGE has transcended localism by nesting their campaign within the wider climate change struggle, RAGE do not appear to share the same concern about its consequences. As one member responded, 'if there comes a time when the nation needs it, and it's an emergency, then it's there to be got ... it's back up for the future' (RAGE#6). Yet, according to YANC, the use of coal is the emergency. Had RAGE been opposing a wind farm development based on comparable grounds to the current campaign, YANC and LFoE would almost certainly be demonstrating against them on the basis of climate change:

YANC is not critical of Banks' wind farm developments. (EA#1)

I suppose we felt, or I would feel a little bit conflicted about that, because we kind of ignored that [community empowerment] with regard to the wind farm [at another site]. And it's tricky, there seems to be, you know, a bit of a conflict there. (EA#2)

The wind farm proposal in question was for a site located approximately five kilometres south of the planned coalmine, which was also a Banks application submitted just one month later, in January 2007. Pontefract Windfarm Action Group (PWAG), the community protest group operating there, did not enjoy the same networking opportunities available to RAGE further north. In fact, LFoE and YANC gave their full support to the project and endorsed Banks' application, with one YANC member receiving vocal abuse from a local resident during a rally in a nearby town. Suggestive of grassroots realpolitik, YANC has frequently alluded to PWAG as 'wind NIMBYs' whilst admitting refraining from making similar judgements of RAGE (EA#1), which demonstrates how accusations of parochialism are selectively employed depending on the type of development proposed. Consequently, PWAG could not link up to wider campaigning networks and thereby jump scales, and the local campaign was constantly at risk of appearing unsophisticated and parochial. Moreover, whereas the normative clout of climate change was wielded by RAGE to counter Banks' application, Banks have tapped into this very same narrative to give credence to their wind farm plans. Nevertheless, the wind farm application was rejected in June 2010 by the Secretary of State after going to appeal.

Concluding remarks

I have argued that RAGE succeeded in challenging Banks' application for an opencast coalmine by simultaneously defending and transcending their local sense of place. Whilst immediate community concerns and local identity were at the discursive core of custodial communitarianism, and quite understandably so, RAGE broadened its campaign horizon by discursively and organisationally linking its formerly localised protest to the internationally salient issue of global climate change.

Certainly, the RAGE campaign had been effective at the local level by interweaving environmental imaginaries of the proposed site with normative discourses on community values, health, democracy and rural morality, to imbue what was an ostensibly unremarkable landscape with broader symbolic significance. Another tactic deployed by RAGE was to rhetorically relate and equate the immediately affected agricultural land with the adjacent nature reserve of special scientific interest to stall development via the planning process. RAGE went above and beyond what many community groups hope to achieve by astutely adapting to the discursive opportunity structure of planning procedures, abandoning instinctive, emotive appeals in favour of the universal language of technical rationalism.

A decisive moment in the dispute came when RAGE hesitantly agreed to combine efforts with the climate change campaign group YANC, which entailed the exposure of an insular community to the unknown influence of outsiders. However, the decision to accept YANC as protest partners proved to be a wholly propitious one, as the group acted as a benevolent Trojan horse for other environmental activists operating in the Yorkshire region. The RAGE campaign was scaled up through networked affiliations between activist elements and lent added gravitas by means of association to the climate change cause, shifting the focus from the fate of the local town to the state of the global environment. As the comparative example of the wind farm application attests quite clearly, such opportunities for scaling up local campaigns may not always be forthcoming for community groups, depending on the discursive opportunity structure at the time.

For instance, the decision to reject Banks' coalmine application may have been different had it been made subsequent to the new planning prerogative set out by the coalition government in favour of development (DCLG 2011), which represents a revalorisation of nature that will move the goalposts on the discursive field for future applications. Indeed, this amongst other policy changes could have significant implications for stakeholder interactions, particularly in terms of how the environment is used by community campaigns as a discursive hook on which to hang other discourses of resistance and bridge to geographically wider struggles. This shift in government planning policy could provide the impetus for local protesters to reframe their grievances in terms of legally-binding climate change initiatives rather than weakening greenbelt protection, although this will hardly be an option for anti-wind farm campaigns.

The ways in which 'natural' landscapes and processes are discursively framed have material consequences for protest opportunities and framing strategy, where in this case, careful coordination between the environmental imaginaries of two separate discourses consolidated a stronger opposition against Banks' team of experts, broadened the focus of RAGE's struggle which may have been accused of NIMBYism and anchored YANC's cosmopolitan agenda in tangible terrain, where both groups gained additional support as a result. This complex nexus between government, developers, communities and campaigners warrants further research, how changing conceptions of 'nature', environmental management policy and the resulting shifts in development trajectories

complicate the discursive opportunity structure of planning disputes, and the tactics and strategies therein. By defending and transcending local identity through environmental discourse, RAGE has achieved what it set out to accomplish – the coal remains underground.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to James Van Alstine, Charlotte Burns, the journal editors and the three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts, and of course, the interviewees for kindly participating in the study.

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