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## Learning from wind power

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### Ralitsa Hiteva

Sustainable Consumption Institute and School of Environment and Development,  
University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, England

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**Learning from wind power** edited by J Szarka, R Cowell, G Ellis, P Strachan, C Warren;  
Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hants, 2012, 259 pages, hardcover £57.50,  
ISBN 9780230298743

It is hard not to get excited by wind power. Since the 1990s wind power has opened up several gold veins for research on the policy, planning consent, and acceptance of onshore, and more recently offshore, wind. Wind power production has introduced a range of new stakeholders, regulation, and incentives that challenge the patterns of governance. Although it has become the epicentre of many controversies, most favoured future energy mix scenarios and low-carbon transition pathways involve a rapid increase in the delivery of wind power.

*Learning from Wind Power* singles wind out as a 'trailblazer' and 'pioneer test' for other renewables and attempts to provide a synthesis of the existing knowledge, identifying policy lessons that can be learned and applied to other renewables. The book is part of Palgrave Macmillan's Energy, Climate and the Environment Series, and brings together an edited collection of international and interdisciplinary research focused on the governance and policy of wind. Reflecting a twin emphasis on governance and societal engagement, in part I the editors focus on learning related to the efficacy of financing, support, and planning mechanisms for wind, while in part II they examine various dimensions of deployment from the perspective of the communities and individuals involved in wind power delivery. Offering comparisons of governance practices, policy, and incentives within the Europe and North America, the book is useful for several audiences: policy makers at national, municipal, and EU levels; planners; and undergraduate and postgraduate students interested in researching wind power for their dissertations (chapter 2 by Elliott is a good starting point for onshore wind novices, while chapter 5 by Jay provides an overview of the development of offshore wind). The book will be an interesting read for industry journalists, the wind industry (especially wind project managers), and the array of communities, NGOs, and think tanks looking to intertwine their mandates with the power of wind. The rich case studies, the multidisciplinary perspectives on community engagement and planning of wind projects, and Pasqualetti typologies of wind opposition in chapter 7—based on four types of concerns: T1 (aesthetic), T2 (environmental), T3 (health and safety), and T4 (social/cultural)—should put this book on the reading lists of university courses.

What the book does well is to identify and discuss several barriers to making wind projects more acceptable for communities and environmental groups. It also points to good practices in policy making and planning that should feature in mature (second-generation) wind policy. The logic behind the editors' decision to focus closely on wind is appealing at first sight, but the case made for transferability of the knowledge and lessons learned from wind power to other renewables has considerable limitations. Despite the fact that the book covers a wide range of issues around community acceptance, the specificity of wind (experienced rather than heard or seen—for more see chapter 8 by Haggett), makes transferability to other types of renewables an overly ambitious objective. The book comes closest to achieving this with chapter 3, which takes a comparative look at financial incentives (renewable obligation

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certificates and feed-in tariffs) in the UK and Germany, and with the discussion of the role of intermediation in facilitating local acceptance of wind projects (chapter 10). The applicability of onshore wind knowledge to the rapidly developing offshore wind industry is evident in Devine-Wright's chapter 10, which paints the landscapes of acceptance and opposition to offshore wind, evoking images of island dunes and industrial areas, and reminding the reader of the importance of place, symbolic meanings, and relationality.

Operating on the premise that the process of planning and community acceptance is one of the key barriers to increasing renewables, the book calls for expanding the understanding of planning (going beyond the process of consent) and examining spatial planning interventions over long periods of time for a new perspective on the fundamental processes of adjustment and change (chapter 4 by Power and Cowell). Moving beyond a zero-sum approach to planning and acceptance is a strong subtheme of the book, focusing away from block categories of interests and towards 'reflexivity'—the mutual transformation of institutions, values, and systems—of wind power production. Intermediaries (go-betweens who reshape relations between social actors with different interests through means such as transfer of knowledge and information, and regulatory interpretation) are seen as stepping in to (re)construct landscapes of trust between the communities and the developers (chapter 10 by Devine-Wright). However, the editors caution that even credible intermediaries are not enough to cover the fundamental crises of governance—an ever-declining trust in public institutions and business.

Although community acceptance has long been treated as the holy grail of wind power, Huber, Hobarty, and Ellis (chapter 11) question whether the perception of what constitutes community acceptance and how it can be achieved is not biased towards industry interests. The editors argue that wind power is dogged by misconceptions, which often end up benefitting conventional energy providers, by providing them with political cover, while undermining and stigmatising stakeholders in renewables (chapter 12). Overemphasising the impact of local opposition on wind projects by industry, for one leaves more important factors in relative darkness, while governments' uncritical acceptance of these misconceptions often end up justifying more pro-market regulation and limiting local decision making. This perpetuation of the cycle of distrust in energy governance is a barrier in the low-carbon transition worth learning from.

A synthesis of the discussions around some of the key policy and governance controversies surrounding wind power is a timely endeavour, with considerable value in drawing out lessons from such a wide range of international case studies. Despite the notable absence of meaningful wind industry perspectives in the policy section of the book, *Learning from Wind Power* is an accessible and weighty contribution to the field.