Recognition, Trust, and Timing: Community Acceptance of Nearshore Wind in Jammerland Bugt

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Denmark's green transition increasingly depends on rural and coastal landscapes to host renewable energy infrastructure. Yet local resistance continues to delay projects, particularly nearshore wind farms, where visual proximity and recreational use intensify concerns (Ladenburg 2010; Wolsink 2010). The Jammerland Bugt Nearshore Wind Farm illustrates this tension. Despite its strategic location near Kalundborg's industrial symbiosis and its contribution to national climate goals (Kalundborg Symbiosis 2025; Government of Denmark 2020), the project has faced more than a decade of contestation (Energiklagenævnet 2025; TV2 Øst 2022). Understanding why requires looking beyond traditional NIMBY explanations and examining how fairness, recognition, and trust shape community acceptance (Aitken 2010; Schlosberg 2007).

Visualisation of the planned nearshore wind farm as seen from Reersø (*Source: European Energy*)

What is a nearshore wind farm?

Nearshore wind farms are offshore installations located within 15 kilometres of the coastline (Klinge Jacobsen et al. 2019). They combine the technical advantages of offshore wind with the visibility and local sensitivity of onshore projects. In Denmark, shallow seabeds make nearshore installations economically attractive, but their proximity to beaches, summerhouse areas, and valued landscapes often heightens local contestation (Hevia Koch & Jacobsen 2019; Papazu 2017; Johansen 2019). Jammerland Bugt is a clear example, as the site is ideal from an energy-planning perspective, but it is also

embedded in everyday recreational life, shaping how residents evaluate the project (Farstad & Rye 2013; Pitkänen et al. 2014).

Studying community acceptance through environmental justice

This study applies a multidimensional environmental justice framework to understand how residents and summerhouse owners perceive the Jammerland Bugt project. Using a mixed-methods design, the research combines 25 semi-structured interviews with a survey of 153 respondents. The interviews provide insight into lived experiences, local values, and perceptions of fairness (Bernard 2011; Dwyer & Buckle 2009), while the survey identifies broader patterns of trust, dissatisfaction, and support (Jones & Eiser 2009; Brannström et al. 2022. Together, these methods reveal how procedural, distributive, and recognition justice shape local responses to the project (Fraser 1995; Jenkins et al. 2016; Coolsaet & Néron 2020).

Key contributions to understanding acceptance

The findings show that opposition to the Jammerland Bugt project is fragmented and cannot be reduced to NIMBY motives (Devine-Wright 2009; Dear 1992). Instead, residents' evaluations are shaped by whether they feel recognised, respected, and meaningfully included in the decision-making process. Many describe early engagement as insufficient, information as inaccessible, and local values as overlooked. These experiences influence how they interpret later stages of the process, including compensation schemes and updated environmental assessments (Jørgensen et al. 2020; Energistyrelsen 2018).

Quantitative results reinforce this picture. Trust in the developer emerges as the strongest predictor of project support, while visual and noise concerns play a far smaller role than often assumed (Dugstad et al. 2020). Climate concern alone does not translate into support; instead, trust, transparency, and perceived sincerity matter most. Recognition justice thus becomes the interpretive lens through which residents evaluate procedural and distributive fairness, shaping whether they view the project as legitimate (Schlosberg 2004; Jenkins et al. 2018).

The study also highlights the importance of timing. Early failures of recognition created path-dependent narratives of exclusion, which later engagement efforts struggled to overcome (Mahoney 2000). Even when new information or compensatory measures were introduced,

many residents perceived them as symbolic or insincere because they arrived too late in the process. Integrating policy sequencing into the justice framework shows how timing and order influence legitimacy in renewable energy development (Meckling et al. 2017).

Barriers to enhancing community acceptance

Several barriers hinder the ability of nearshore wind projects to foster community acceptance. Early engagement was limited, creating long-lasting distrust that shaped later interactions. Information was often perceived as incomplete or overly technical, making it difficult for residents to evaluate impacts (Energistyrelsen 2019b) . Mixed communities of permanent residents and summerhouse owners held different attachments to the landscape, complicating the developer's engagement strategy (Frederiksen 2019; Johansen 2019). Finally, shifting regulatory requirements and lengthy permitting processes created uncertainty, reinforcing perceptions of procedural unfairness.

Together, these barriers show how recognition, trust, and timing interact to shape acceptance. They also illustrate the limits of current engagement models, which often focus on information provision rather than meaningful dialogue.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that community acceptance of nearshore wind in Denmark is shaped less by visual impacts and more by recognition, trust, and the temporal sequencing of engagement. A temporally sensitive environmental justice framework reveals how early missteps can create path dependencies that later efforts struggle to repair (Mahoney 2000; Pierson 2000). To foster socially sustainable renewable energy transitions, developers and authorities must prioritise early, continuous, and locally embedded engagement practices that acknowledge place-based attachments and local knowledge (Van Veelen & Haggett 2016). As Denmark accelerates its green transition, the Jammerland Bugt case underscores that legitimacy is not only a technical or economic matter but fundamentally a social one.

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