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Windfalls for whom? The evolving notion of 'community' in community benefit provisions from wind farms

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Abstract

This paper investigates the increasing provision of 'community benefits' – i.e. financial or material benefits to communities affected by wind energy development – with a focus on on-shore wind projects in Wales. The paper argues that as community benefits are becoming more significant in scale, so pressures are mounting on what have hitherto been largely *ad hoc* arrangements for their disbursement. The paper finds that previously dominant definitions of communities as places directly affected by and within close proximity to wind farm development, are being challenged by the tendency to define 'affected' communities as broader entities characterised by more indirect and widely dispersed claims to benefit entitlement. This redefinition of the recipient community is causing conflict, much of it focused on debates about how community benefits should be governed. Evidence suggests that any re-scaling of relations around community benefits – from local compensation towards wider development goals – may be more consensually achieved in communities with previous experience in handling these funds, and where growing income streams allow multiple constituencies to be satisfied.

Highlights

► This paper examines 'community benefits' from wind energy developments in Wales. ► Benefits are becoming more significant in scale and more challenging to administer. ► Benefits are no longer limited to those directly affected by developments. ► Benefits are being distributed over wider geographical and interest communities. ► Redefining the recipient community is causing governance conflicts.

Keywords

Community benefit; Wind farms; Community governance

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