



Robust delivery, fragile legitimacy: How beliefs-rooted value conflict shapes project outcomes over time in an energy transition project

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Energy transition
Project legacy
Project outcomes
Values-as-beliefs
Value conflict

ABSTRACT

Although value co-creation is often considered as achieving planned project outcomes, the impact of conflicting values-as-beliefs on those outcomes remains underexplored. A beliefs-rooted value conflict occurs when project actors hold competing beliefs about what is right or desirable to do, such that realising one constrains or undermines the other. This paper explores how a beliefs-rooted value conflict manifests in project processes and shapes project outcomes using the Fosen Wind project – a contested wind energy project in Norway. Adopting a valuation lens, we trace how actors' evaluative stances produce divergent engagements and practices, constituting an ongoing conflict process that shapes short- and long-term outcomes. We find a specific temporal dynamic: beliefs-rooted oppositions repeatedly deferred rather than resolved intensify across project stages, producing long-term legitimacy fragility despite achieving short-term delivery robustness. Our study shows that identifying value-conflicts' true nature and addressing them accordingly is key to creating value for involved actors.

1. Introduction

Prior research conceptualises projects as vehicles for value creation and delivery, where value is generally defined in terms of stakeholders' perceived worth – benefits and costs – over the project life cycle (Arto et al., 2016; Morris, 2013). More recently, this stream has expanded to acknowledge the plurality of value, its subjective nature, and how actors' deeply rooted beliefs influence the value pursued in projects (Martinsuo, 2020; Martinsuo et al., 2019). The latter acknowledges that the beliefs held by different project stakeholders, or project actors, about what is appropriate to do or attain influence the value-as-worth that projects ultimately create (Martinsuo, 2020). When actors hold competing beliefs about what is right or desirable, and realising one constrains or undermines the other, a beliefs-rooted value conflict emerges. There has been considerable focus on value co-creation (Lehtinen et al., 2019) and how stakeholders' different value expectations can be brought together through shared vision (Chi et al., 2022) or collaborative projecting (Bos-de Vos et al., 2025). By contrast, how

value conflicts rooted in competing beliefs emerge, develop, and shape project outcomes has been underplayed. As Kuitert et al. (2023) show, better understanding value conflict is key for addressing the increased complexity of project networks. Yet existing research does not trace how such conflicts unfold across the project lifecycle and how they may accumulate into consequences that extend beyond the project itself.

Our starting point is that projects with major value conflicts visible at the outset often fail to materialise due to their internal contestation. Projects that proceed, however, may do so because value conflicts are absorbed into the project structure and treated as manageable disagreements. Such projects often become visible more for the value conflicts they embody than for the project idea they deliver, and are increasingly being studied through the lens of stakeholder engagement and, even more recently, involvement of affected stakeholders and communities (Aaltonen et al., 2024; Van Den Ende & van Marrewijk, 2019). Such studies document that beliefs-rooted conflicts persist and resist resolution through conventional approaches. For example, Van Den Ende and van Marrewijk (2019) show how humanistic

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2026.102900>

Received 22 December 2025; Received in revised form 15 July 2026; Accepted 20 July 2026

Available online 21 July 2026

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legitimation approaches can, over time, reshape the institutional context of contested projects. Yet the literature does not trace how beliefs-rooted conflicts unfold in project processes and shape project outcomes over time. We are particularly interested in conflicts where project-actors' beliefs are irreconcilable, meaning that the conflict cannot be designed out at the front-end and must therefore be carried across the entire project lifecycle. These conflicts are distinct from logical paradoxes or contradictions that can ultimately be resolved through negotiation, compensation, or redesign, and ultimately reconciled.

We ask: *How does a beliefs-rooted value conflict manifest in project processes and shape project outcomes over time?* By project outcomes, we mean not only the short- and longer-term results or impacts the project creates and delivers for stakeholders (the value dimensions the value-as-worth perspective foregrounds) but also the consequences for the project's legitimacy and affected communities that emerge from how beliefs-rooted value conflict unfolds across the project lifecycle.

To address this question, we selected a highly contested project as our empirical setting and adopted a valuation lens (Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013) that shifts attention from value as an abstract property to valuation as observable practice, focusing on what actors concretely do to establish something as valuable. This lens connects value-as-worth and values-as-beliefs by specifying how actors' evaluative stances manifest as distinct valuation practices: commensuration for worth-based reasoning, resistance to commensuration for beliefs-based reasoning (Espeland & Stevens, 1998; Perlaviciute & Steg, 2014).

We employ a longitudinal case study of the Fosen Wind project in Norway, a contested wind energy development in which Indigenous Sámi cultural values conflict with the sustainability priorities of the project promoters. The dispute revolved around large-scale onshore wind infrastructure in an area where Sámi communities practise reindeer herding as their primary livelihood and cultural expression. The case is analytically well-suited because it involves two clearly articulated beliefs whose simultaneous realisation within the project proved irreconcilable, spans the complete project lifecycle from initiation through post-closure, and is extensively documented through legal, institutional, and regulatory records. We find that the project achieved operational completion, yet the repeated deferral of beliefs-rooted objections enabled short-term delivery while progressively undermining the project's long-term outcomes and legacy. A longitudinal approach allows us to trace how these practices and their consequences unfolded across project stages.

Our study makes three contributions. First, we distinguish analytically between worth-rooted and beliefs-rooted value conflicts, showing that they map onto different evaluative stances, different handling approaches, and fundamentally different consequences for projects. Second, we identify an empirically derived temporal dynamic: beliefs-rooted objections deferred rather than resolved intensify across project stages, producing short-term delivery robustness but long-term legitimacy fragility. Third, we demonstrate that valuation practices serve as empirical traces through which beliefs-rooted conflicts can be studied in concrete project processes and decisions.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 develops our conceptualisation of value conflict, drawing on project management, energy transition and Indigenous justice literatures, and explains the valuation lens. Section 3 presents the Fosen case, data collection, and analysis. Section 4 presents findings tracing the value conflict across four project stages. Section 5 discusses contributions, practical implications, and limitations.

2. Literature review: value conflict in projects

2.1. Value conflict from a value-as-worth perspective

Value in projects has received significant attention in project management literature, primarily from a value-as-worth perspective

(Martinsuo, 2020; Martinsuo et al., 2019), which treats value as the advantages or benefits a stakeholder gains relative to the costs or sacrifices involved (Laursen & Svejvig, 2016). There is a range of terminologies across literature to refer to worth at the project, organisational, and inter-organisational levels, including worth, value, value rationales, value domains, exchange value, orders of worth, benefits, and public values (Table 5 in the appendix provides a summary). Value-as-worth has been shown to be multidimensional, subjectively assessed, and dynamically shaped across project lifecycles (Artto et al., 2016; Martinsuo et al., 2019; Zerjav et al., 2021), which naturally brings value conflicts into play. Value conflict from a value-as-worth perspective refers to a situation in which stakeholders hold incompatible or competing perceptions of what constitutes worth, desirability, or benefit, resulting in conflicts over project priorities, decisions, outcomes, or resource allocations. Research on such conflicts can be organised along two streams, both addressing how value plurality, the coexistence of diverse stakeholder perceptions, criteria, and interpretations of worth, emerges and is handled.

A first stream takes organisations as the analytical focus, primarily investigating how an organisation may have to deal with competing considerations of worth in its value creation and value capture. Zerjav (2021) identifies distinct value rationales through which organisations participate in projects, including owners capturing prospective value, project-based firms seeking proportional returns, and temporary organisations creating collaborative outputs. The study shows how misalignment between expected and realised value produces competing interests. Bos-de Vos et al. (2019) trace how financial and professional value dimensions slip between project phases and can be managed through portfolio-level compensations and reputational trade-offs. Bos-de Vos et al. (2016) reveal how professional value (reputation, development, and work pleasure) is systematically prioritised over financial value in architectural firms, even at the cost of financial slippage.

A second stream examines value plurality in multi-stakeholder interaction across organisations, recognising different stakeholders sometimes have divergent interests and assessments of costs (or sacrifices) and benefits, leading to conflicts. Zerjav et al. (2021) show that value in infrastructure front-ends manifests at multiple analytical levels, with the front-end as the site where value legitimacy is established and plurality becomes visible. Toukola et al. (2023) show how public and private actors navigate divergent value orientations through front-end co-creation processes to jointly establish project value. Artto et al. (2016) and Chi et al. (2022) show that value creation extends into the operational phase and that shared vision facilitates co-creation, though dysfunctional competition undermines it. Liu and Zhang (2025) find that moral reflexivity can mitigate ethical tensions in project networks, while Aaltonen et al. (2024), from a stakeholder perspective, argue for including marginalised voices and moral responsibility in engagement (see also Lehtinen et al. (2023); Keeyes and Huemann (2017)). Across both streams, conflicts arise from multiple legitimate worth dimensions that actors prioritise differently. Such conflicts are not inherently destructive but a structural feature of settings — whether within or across organisations — where actors hold different but commensurable assessments, addressable through value trade-offs (Bos-de Vos et al., 2016), front-end negotiation (Toukola et al., 2023; Zerjav et al., 2021), portfolio decisions (Bos-de Vos et al., 2019), and moral reflexivity (Liu & Zhang, 2025).

The handling of these conflicts is typically managerial. Ninan et al. (2019) show that project teams deploy power-based strategies (persuasion, deputation, give and take, extra work for stakeholders, and flexibility) to manage external stakeholder resistance in megaprojects. Raudasoja et al. (2025) show how communication, involvement, and compensation build social acceptance in wind farm projects. Williams et al. (2019), reviewing 524 publications, synthesise knowledge on handling conflicts through stakeholder classification, multi-criteria analysis, and structured decision processes. The underlying logic

behind these responses to value conflict is consequential reasoning, which concerns assessing choices by their expected consequences, preferring actions believed to produce the most desirable outcomes (Perlaviciute & Steg, 2014). Project-actors weigh costs against benefits and, when offered sufficient compensation, conflicts can in principle be resolved. This does not mean they are minor. They can be persistent and consequential, but they operate within a shared evaluative stance in which parties agree on what counts as a relevant outcome and disagree about its distribution.

However, as Veeneman et al. (2009) demonstrate, even advanced approaches can be insufficient when conflicting regulatory and institutional streams pull value-as-worth into divergent directions. Their “hailstorm” metaphor captures how conflicts escalate beyond what managerial coordination can absorb yet lacks an explanation for why some conflicts resist resolution. This points to the possibility that behind the value conflicts documented within the worth perspective, there may be deeper sources of conflict.

2.2. Value conflict from a values-as-beliefs perspective

2.2.1. Beliefs-rooted value conflicts in project management literature

A smaller but consequential stream has reframed value and value conflict through a fundamentally different lens: values-as-beliefs. We use this term to encompass a range of related terminologies across the literature, including normative beliefs, belief systems, worldviews, logics of evaluation and justification, institutional logics, and organisational values (see Table 5 in the appendix for a summary). Martinsuo (2020) makes a pivotal contribution by drawing on Rokeach's (1973) definition of values as actors' enduring beliefs about preferable modes of conduct and desired end-states, arguing that these beliefs must be addressed to explain why stakeholders pursue particular objectives and why some conflicts resist managerial resolution. Values operate not as abstract ideals but as enacted beliefs that shape how actors interpret projects and make decisions. Martinsuo also identifies three challenges that the value-as-worth perspective alone cannot resolve: subjectivity, dynamics, and tensions. She argues that considering values-as-beliefs helps explain their persistence. Subjectivity reflects stakeholders' different underlying beliefs, dynamics arise because beliefs evolve through lifecycle events, and tensions intensify when beliefs about what is right compete with assessments of what is beneficial. This reframing is significant: when actors hold conflicting beliefs about what a project should achieve, the resulting conflict is qualitatively different from a conflict about costs and benefits because it concerns what is believed as right or desirable to pursue. We define beliefs-rooted value conflicts as conflicts between two or more competing values that actors hold and believe in, where realising one value constrains or undermines the realisation of another.

Kuitert et al. (2023) provide an empirical investigation of beliefs-rooted value conflict. Drawing on Rokeach (1973), they study a municipal park development embedded in an urban redevelopment project and identify four conflict arenas where diverging beliefs embedded in institutional systems, municipal accountability versus collaborative participation, generate persistent conflict. Their seven coping patterns, related to projects' temporal dimension (deferral, prolongation, anticipation) and spatial dimension (prevalence, relegation, aggravation, coincidence), reveal that actors continuously rearrange rather than resolve such conflicts. The worth perspective cannot explain this persistence: conflicts are partially managed through adaptive coping but cannot be resolved through trade-offs. Van Den Ende and van Marrewijk (2019) show how competing modernisation and preservation beliefs in two Amsterdam subway projects (1960–2018) generated persistent conflict, triggering evolving legitimisation approaches, including administrative, technocratic, and humanistic approaches. When value conflicts are grounded in competing institutional logics (beliefs), they can trigger institutional transformation beyond the project itself (see also (Courpasson et al., 2012; McAdam et al., 2010) and

reshape project governance. Whyte et al. (2026) advance this conversation through the concept of temporally situated value systems, showing how project delivery teams and local communities operate through mutually incompatible evaluations anchored in different temporal horizons, where the absence of common ground makes engagement feel like compromise rather than genuine dialogue. Together, these studies establish that beliefs-rooted value conflicts can be structurally resistant to resolution as negotiation and trade-offs presuppose a shared evaluative framework that, in beliefs-rooted conflict, does not exist. While the literature recognises temporal dimensions of this resistance by notions such as coping through deferral, humanistic legitimisation approaches, or incompatible temporal horizons, it does not trace how these dynamics accumulate across project stages into outcomes.

To develop this analytical thread, we turn to the energy transition and Indigenous justice literatures, which provide the mechanism explaining why beliefs-rooted conflicts resist typical project management approaches: when actors reason deontologically from constitutive beliefs, the very evaluative framework that existing approaches presuppose is bypassed.

2.2.2. Beliefs-rooted value conflicts in energy transition and Indigenous justice literature

A key insight from the energy transition literature concerns the mode of reasoning through which actors evaluate projects. Values shape not only which costs and benefits people prioritise, but also how they evaluate them, making the same alternative appear fundamentally positive or negative depending on the holder's beliefs (Perlaviciute & Steg, 2014; Steg et al., 2011). Perlaviciute and Steg (2014) distinguish between consequential reasoning — weighing costs against benefits — and deontological reasoning — judging an action as right or wrong irrespective of outcomes. When actors operate through consequential reasoning (typical in worth-oriented project management), trade-offs remain structurally possible. When actors evaluate through deontological reasoning, no amount of compensation can address the fundamental beliefs-rooted conflicts that may exist in a project, because the action itself violates constitutive beliefs about what is right. The conflict is not about the distribution of worth but about the legitimacy of the project's existence.

In settings involving Indigenous populations, these dynamics are especially pronounced. MacArthur and Matthewman (2018) show how tikanga Māori, their customary beliefs and practices centred on mana (authority, dignity), whakapapa (genealogy, interconnection), utu (balance, reciprocity), and kaitiakitanga (guardianship, stewardship), shape Māori communities' evaluation of energy infrastructure in Aotearoa New Zealand. These are deeply held convictions about what constitutes right relationships with land, people, and ancestors. When communities evaluate geothermal development through kaitiakitanga, or when environmental degradation is understood as degrading mana, this is deontological reasoning triggered by constitutive values. The conflict is not about costs and benefits but between Indigenous relational ethics and neoliberal market logic at the level of constitutive beliefs. Velasco-Herrejón et al. (2022) contrast Indigenous and modernist beliefs in Zapotec communities in Mexico. When developers organised a corporate imitation of the vela, a sacred communal vigil, exclusively for land-leasing tenants and distributed access by hectares contracted, the community experienced this as a violation of the relational and spiritual foundations of their collective life: convictions about comunalidad, sacred land, and reciprocity that align with Rokeach's (1973) concept. The authors frame the conflict as an ontological clash and critique the reduction of value to economic framing.

Energy justice scholarship identifies distributional, procedural, and recognition dimensions as central to understanding how energy systems embed normative claims about justice (Rioux-Gobeil & Thomassin, 2024; Whyte, 2023). Whyte (2023) argues that Indigenous beliefs about people, land, and sovereignty are constitutive commitments, not preferences to be balanced. Rioux-Gobeil and Thomassin (2024) identify

an insidious loop whereby colonial legacies undermine Indigenous self-determination in energy governance, noting that even justice-oriented frameworks can reproduce the hierarchies they seek to challenge.

This literature reveals that beliefs-rooted value conflict operates at a fundamentally different level than conflicts from a value-as-worth perspective. Such conflicts involve confrontations between competing normative orders, enacted through resistance, legal contestation, and struggles over legitimacy. Standard stakeholder management founded in the managerial logic described in Section 2.1 proves insufficient, not because it is poorly executed, but because it presupposes a shared evaluative framework that does not exist (cf., (MacArthur & Matthewman, 2018; Velasco-Herrejón et al., 2022; Whyte, 2023). What these contexts demand is recognition of fundamentally different beliefs as legitimate bases for project decisions.

MacArthur and Matthewman (2018) document how Māori-led energy trusts restructured governance around *tikanga* principles, replacing “resources” and “stakeholders” with relational obligations, enabling, for instance, the Tuaropaki Trust to operate a geothermal plant as a communal enterprise rather than a shareholder-value venture. Velasco-Herrejón et al. (2022) suggest “pluriversal technologies” embracing ontological diversity through co-design and co-ownership, arguing that resolution requires restructuring the epistemological foundations of project definition, not just participation. Whyte (2023) argues that the question is typically misframed: the issue is not how projects can minimise harm, but whether Indigenous peoples exercise self-determination over infrastructure decisions at all, pointing to institutional destruction that renders standard engagement structurally inadequate.

Sections 2.1 and 2.2 described how value conflicts can be conceptualised in projects with potential for significant contestation. The analytical challenge is to understand how beliefs-rooted conflicts evolve and are enacted over time and influence project processes, outcomes, and legacy. The project management literature documents their persistence (Kuitert et al., 2023) and capacity to produce incompatible evaluations of success (Whyte et al., 2026). The energy justice literature shows they are rooted in different beliefs about justice, sovereignty, and the relationship between people and land (Sovacool & Dworkin, 2014; Whyte, 2023), and specifies the mechanism, namely deontological reasoning anchored in constitutive beliefs, that explains why suggested engagement approaches in project management prove structurally insufficient when these beliefs are at stake. But neither traces how beliefs are enacted in concrete project decisions and how those decisions accumulate into outcomes beyond the project’s boundaries. This is the task our study takes up, drawing on a valuation lens for tracing this process.

2.3. Valuation as the analytical lens connecting worth and beliefs

The theoretical framework developed in Sections 2.1 and 2.2, distinguishing worth-rooted from beliefs-rooted value conflicts through their evaluative stances and modes of reasoning, requires a mechanism for translating this distinction into empirically traceable practices. For this purpose, we draw on valuation studies (Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013; Muniesa, 2011) and the sociology of commensuration (Espeland & Stevens, 1998). This shifts attention from value as an abstract entity to valuation practices — what actors concretely do to make something count as valuable. Helgesson and Muniesa (2013) frame valuation as an engaging social practice, positioning its study around how worth is performed rather than treating value as a stable property. Muniesa (2011) argues that value is produced through practical situations, not a thing to be measured but an outcome of social practices that construct and appraise worth through practical activity.

Within the broader sociology of valuation and evaluation (Lamont, 2012), a central concept is commensuration, which is the transformation of different qualities into a common metric that allows

comparison. Espeland and Stevens (1998) theorise commensuration as a social process and show that resistance to it emerges where values and identities are constitutively at stake and where considering certain things commensurable fundamentally alters what they are. This distinction is crucial: it provides the mechanism through which different beliefs generate different evaluative stances. When an actor’s relationship to what they value is instrumental, commensuration is appropriate and consequential reasoning follows; when the relationship is constitutive, commensuration is resisted and deontological reasoning prevails. Importantly, this distinction does not imply that actors who commensurate hold no beliefs. Promoters of large-scale projects may be deeply committed to institutional logics such as sustainability or national development. The analytical difference is that such values-as-beliefs are enacted through consequential reasoning embedded in institutional structures, whereas constitutive beliefs are enacted through deontological reasoning that resists the evaluative framework itself.

Drawing on these insights, we develop an analytical lens that connects the two perspectives by specifying two concrete mechanisms through which actors enact their beliefs: commensuration and resistance to commensuration as observable valuation practices (Espeland & Stevens, 1998; Muniesa, 2011). In contested projects such as Fosen, different actors employ different valuation practices (impact assessments, cost-benefit analyses, legal adjudication, cultural heritage claims) each enacting different underlying beliefs about what should matter. By tracing these practices across the project lifecycle, we can follow how beliefs-rooted conflicts manifest in concrete decisions and accumulate into outcomes and institutional legacies.

3. Method

3.1. Case description – the Fosen Wind project

The empirical setting of this study is the Fosen Wind project (hereafter the Fosen project), which concerns the construction of, at the time of writing this article, Europe’s largest land-based (onshore) wind power plant with six wind farms in central Norway (Fosen region). The project was initiated and developed with strong political support, driven by Norway’s commitment to reducing CO2 emissions, expanding renewable energy, and electrifying society, first articulated in the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, entering into force in 2005. Norway further concretised these goals in the 2015 Paris Agreement, pledging to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030 (a target later strengthened to 50–55% in 2020). With these targets in mind, the Norwegian government has, over the past two decades, actively promoted and implemented major energy infrastructure projects to advance its sustainability ambitions.

The first proposal for the Fosen project was submitted to the Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate (NVE) (a public organisation, subordinate to the Ministry of Energy, responsible for managing Norway’s water and energy resources) in 2002. NVE’s licensing process includes open consultations, public meetings, and dialogue with local and regional authorities, ensuring stakeholders can voice their views. After a detailed process, NVE and the Ministry of Energy granted final licences for the Fosen wind farms in 2013, except for one farm that had received its licence already in 2004. Construction began in 2016, and the last turbine was installed in August 2020. Together, the wind farms now consist of 277 turbines. The total power production capacity of the project is 1057 MW. In 2021, one of the six wind farms was sold to Aneo and its partner Stadtwerke München. As a result, the current infrastructure consists of five wind farms, with a total output of 801 MW and an annual production of approximately 2.6 TWh of renewable energy (Fosen Vind).

3.2. Key project actors and the value conflict

Fosen Vind DA is responsible for the construction of the project.

Fosen Vind DA is a joint venture company, owned by the Norwegian energy companies Statkraft (52.1%) and Aneo (7.9%), Nordic Wind Power DA (40.0%) (a European investor consortium owned by Energy Infrastructure Partners, and by the Swiss power company BKW AG). On behalf of Fosen Vind DA, the wind farm developer and operator is Statkraft, a Norwegian-established, globally leading company in the energy market and one of Europe's largest producers of renewable energy. In justifying the Fosen project, the developer and the state have consistently grounded their approaches and activities in their belief that green energy projects need to be advanced to create a more sustainable Norway for both Norwegians and communities beyond its borders.

The development of the project has been marked with value conflict which became visible through the opposition by two key actors: the Fosen region's Sámi reindeer herding groups (Sør-Fosen sijte and Nord-Fosen siida) and Motvind Norge, a politically independent organisation advocating for sustainable energy management without the wind industry. The Sámi herding groups expressed concern from initiation to post-closure that the project could harm their livelihood and cultural rights, while Motvind became officially active during the project's implementation phase and emphasised the importance of preserving natural resources. Both believed these interests could be undermined by the outcomes of the Fosen project. This paper focuses specifically on the value conflict between the Sámi herding groups and the developer.

Reindeer husbandry is central to Sámi culture and livelihood and protected under the Sámi Act, the Human Rights Act, and the Reindeer Husbandry Act. It is practised by about 2600 Sámi in Norway and regulated by the 2007 Reindeer Herding Act. Reindeer graze across six pasture areas covering 40% of mainland Norway, including Fosen. The Sør-Fosen sijte and Nord-Fosen siida consist of six families with up to 2100 reindeer, herding across seasonal pastures in a 4339 km² area. Reindeer herding in Fosen dates back to the 1500s. The largest Fosen wind farms lie within these grazing districts, raising concerns about the loss of vital seasonal pastures and long-term threats to herding. Traditional Sámi herding practices are essential to sustaining Sámi livelihood, culture, and language. In particular, the Sør-Fosen Sámi language, which is recognised as critically endangered, is closely tied to herding traditions. Accordingly, the Sámi families in Fosen have consistently grounded their engagement in the project in their belief that their human, livelihood, and cultural rights are important and need to be protected, and they have repeatedly contested the project, demanding its cessation.

The Fosen case is analytically well-suited to this study for four reasons. First, it involves a pronounced conflict between two clearly and publicly articulated beliefs (environmental sustainability and Indigenous cultural rights), making both sides' reasoning empirically accessible. Second, it spans the complete project lifecycle from initiation through post-closure, enabling longitudinal tracing. Third, extensive documentation (licensing applications, impact assessments, court files at three judicial levels, and complaints to international bodies) provides exceptional access to both actors' evaluations. Fourth, the Supreme Court ruling created a clear analytical endpoint where evolving contestation crystallised into consequences for both the project and the broader institutional landscape.

3.3. Data collection

This study draws on two complementary data sources: secondary documents and ten semi-structured interviews. The documents provide a detailed longitudinal record of how the value conflict materialised in concrete activities and decisions across the project lifecycle, while the interviews provide contextual understanding and access to actors' own accounts of their reasoning and engagement.

The documentary data span from the project's initiation in 2006 to June 2025, comprising publicly available documents and documents accessed-upon-request. We chose secondary data given the extensive media coverage and wide availability of data generated by involved organisations and in the legal dispute (cf., (Gemünden et al., 2024;

Oliveri et al., 2024)). From an initial set of 117 official policy documents, media reports, and institutional statements, we focused on 98 documents related to the Sámi conflict (Table 1; detailed overview in Appendix Table 4). Documents such as legal files, formal complaints, impact assessments, and institutional statements are particularly well-suited to studying value conflict because they contain actors' explicit articulations of what matters to them and why they consider their position justified. Such documents offer concrete valuation practices: activities through which beliefs are enacted and made visible. Legal proceedings, in particular, required both sides to formalise their positions, producing a detailed record of evaluative reasoning. While documents cannot fully capture the lived experience of the conflict, they provide a reliable trace of how beliefs were translated into consequential and deontological arguments within institutional arenas.

We also conducted ten semi-structured interviews with key project actors representing six perspectives (Table 1), each lasting 60–90 min. Interviews were organised around key contextual aspects; interviewees' engagement and the reasoning behind their activities and decisions; their assessment of consultations, technical studies, and mitigation measures; their evaluation of project outcomes and the extent to which concerns were recognised; and reflections on how the conflict evolved over time. The protocol was flexible, allowing elaboration on events most relevant to each perspective while maintaining thematic consistency. Four interviews were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized; six were documented through detailed notes without identifying

Table 1
Data overview.

	Type of document, number of documents	Sources
Publicly available data	Policy Documents: <u>6 documents</u> Media Reports: <u>12 documents</u>	Fosen Vind NRK Trøndelag NRK Sápmi NRK Regjeringen NVE SWECO Statkraft Multiconsult Statkraft Agder Energi Vind DA ASK Rådgivning AS & SWECO AMBIO Miljørådgivning AS Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum and Energy Fosen Vind AS & TrønderEnergi Kraft AS Fosen Vind Regjeringen Stortinget
	Published Institutional Statements (Including Project Planning Documents): <u>51 documents</u>	Inntrøndelag Tingrett Frostating Lagmannsrett Norges Høyesterett (Supreme Court of Norway)
Legal background - accessed upon request	Court records, court minutes, extract, supplementary extract, decision, closing statement: <u>29 documents</u>	
Interviews for validation purposes	Interviewee from project actors/perspectives: 1. The Ministry of Energy, 1 interview (June 2024) 2. Sámi reindeer herder groups, 3 interviews from 2 interviewees (March/July 2024, August 2025) 3. One of the affected municipalities, 2 interviews from 1 interviewee (Jan/March 2024) 4. International support organisation, 2 interviews from 2 interviewees (August/September 2025) 5. National support organisation, 1 interview from 1 interviewee (August 2025) 6. Academic law expertise, 1 interview from 1 interviewee (September 2025) Total number of interviews: 10 Duration: 60–90 minutes per interview	

information. Interview data served primarily to validate and deepen the document-based analysis. We compared interviewees' accounts of key events and reasoning against the documentary record to check whether documents understated significant aspects and to confirm the interpretive categories emerging from the analysis.

3.4. Data analysis

The analysis included several stages. First, we immersed ourselves in the documents to develop a comprehensive understanding of the case. Second, we constructed a chronological process map identifying key events, decisions, and interactions. The four stages (initiation/licensing, planning, construction/operation, post-closure) emerged inductively as periods with distinct constellations of activities and actor engagement.

Third, we conducted a thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017) of actors' activities across these stages. Drawing on the analytical lens developed in Section 2.3, which grounds the analysis in valuation studies and the sociology of commensuration, we coded activities that revealed how actors evaluated the project. Activities such as impact assessments, cost-benefit analyses, and compensation proposals were coded as worth-oriented valuation practices enacting commensuration (Espeland & Stevens, 1998), rendering different impacts into comparable quantities. Cultural rights claims, legal oppositions, and appeals to international human rights bodies were coded as beliefs-oriented valuation practices enacting resistance to commensuration (Espeland & Stevens, 1998), asserting that certain values cannot be traded or compensated.

Simultaneously, we identified the reasoning underpinning these activities by following Perlaviciute and Steg (2014) in distinguishing between consequential reasoning (weighing costs against benefits, proposing trade-offs) and deontological reasoning (evaluating the project as fundamentally right or wrong irrespective of outcomes). We were attentive to how beliefs operated at different levels: for the Sámi herding groups, beliefs were articulated as cultural and rights-based convictions about their relationship to the land; for the developer and regulatory bodies, beliefs were embedded in institutional logics about legitimate development and sustainability policy. Interview data served

as validation, checking whether document-based interpretations aligned with actors' own accounts.

The theoretical framing guided the analysis along three broader dimensions. First, the distinction between consequential and deontological reasoning allowed us to identify which evaluative stance underpinned specific activities at each stage. Second, we traced how beliefs-rooted opposition raised at one stage was substantively addressed, procedurally absorbed, or deferred, as well as which consequences this produced over time. Third, we examined whether the conflict generated effects beyond the project's boundaries, including institutional learning, regulatory change, and shifts in legitimacy. Together, these dimensions enabled us to trace how the value conflict manifested through concrete valuation practices and how the structural incompatibility between evaluative stances produced cumulative consequences.

Table 3 in the appendix provides a timeline of the value conflict across project stages. While the overall dataset encompasses documentation from multiple sources and perspectives (Table 1), the chronological reconstruction (Table 3 in Appendix) draws primarily on Fosen Vind's documentation, particularly focused on South Fosen, and may carry some bias from the developer's perspective. We validated and strengthened the document analysis through ten interviews with actors representing both promoter and opponent perspectives, gaining deeper understanding of actors' reasoning, expectations, and hindsight reflections on activities throughout the project's process.

4. Findings

Our investigation of how beliefs-rooted value conflict in the Fosen project materialised throughout the project's lifecycle and shaped the project's outcomes revealed two divergent streams of activities — those of the promoting actors and those of the opposing actors — that together mirror the value conflict and shape project outcomes over time. The conflict concerned two central, irreconcilable values-as-beliefs: (1) environmental sustainability as a national priority and (2) the rights and legal status of the Indigenous Sámi community. The conflict between these values-as-beliefs caused contestations in the project: the Sámi

Table 2
Summary of the beliefs-rooted value conflict process across project stages.

Project stage	Promoters' valuation practices (consequential reasoning)	Opponents' valuation practices (deontological reasoning)	Handling of beliefs-rooted conflict	Consequences for outcomes and temporal dynamic
4.1 Licensing (2006–2013)	Impact assessments confirming technical feasibility and national benefit; multiple studies on effects on reindeer husbandry; proposed terrain adaptations and mitigation measures to enable coexistence.	Raised concerns about loss of vital grazing pastures essential to herding for generations; invoked cultural rights and traditional way of life as rights that should not be compromised; formal complaint to the Ministry of Energy.	Concerns absorbed through technical adjustments (e.g., area reduction, road relocations); complaint rejected on grounds of national sustainability priorities and compensability.	Project concept marginally adjusted but advanced on original justification; beliefs-rooted opposition temporally displaced to future stages; <i>conditions set for accumulation.</i>
4.2 Planning (2013–2016)	Consultation meetings on mitigation measures; technical inspections; economic viability reassessed then overridden by political will for green transition.	Refused to discuss mitigation measures before investment decision; viewed consultations as insufficient and unresponsive to core human rights issues; initiated small demonstrations.	Meetings held but limited to technical impacts; core beliefs unaddressed; project approved despite economic doubts.	Opposition deepened; demonstrations initiated; each round of procedural engagement without substantive recognition; <i>deepened accumulation.</i>
4.3 Construction (2016–2020)	Construction proceeded as planned; over 50 inspections, meetings, and home visits; migration route improvements; compensation frameworks; advanced environmental studies.	Legal actions through three court levels; escalation to UN; demonstrations, media engagement, public statements; project experienced as “bit-by-bit” violation on vital grazing areas.	Technical mitigation continued; UN request to halt refused citing national sovereignty; courts initially upheld licences and ordered compensation.	Project delivered on schedule; conflict intensified and sought new arenas of expression; other wind projects paused on Sámi rights grounds; <i>accumulated deferral became significantly visible.</i>
4.4 Post-closure (2021–)	Post-ruling dialogue and emergency support; updated impact assessments; compensation, mediation, and temporary land-use agreements.	Supreme Court affirmed cultural rights as non-overridable; continued advocacy (e.g., artist protest, nationwide marches, youth demonstrations); compensation negotiations.	Supreme Court invalidated concessions; ruled cultural rights cannot be balanced against sustainability goals; remediation efforts ongoing.	Project declared unlawful; reputational damage; negative consequences for owner and authorities; lasting harm to Sámi culture and livelihoods; long-term solutions still unresolved; <i>accumulated deferral crystallised as legitimacy crisis; short-term delivery robustness revealed as long-term fragility.</i>

community did not want the project because of its interference with the social and economic basis of their livelihood while the developer and project promoter (and owner) considered the project key for reaching the national priorities for sustainable development. Of crucial importance is that the conflicting values are both rooted in national law, making them similarly legitimate. In the following subsections, we present the value conflict as a process manifesting itself in the different stages of the project. Table 2 provides a summary of the process of value conflict in terms of what the two actor groups did, how the conflict was approached to be handled, and consequences for project's outcomes.

4.1. Initiation and conceptualisation stage – The licensing process (2006–2013)

Founded on the State's ambitious sustainability goals of the 2000s, the licensing process for wind farms at Fosen began in 2006. Technical evaluations showed that the coastal Fosen area offered excellent wind and terrain conditions. Impact assessments by the Ministry of Energy (MoE) confirmed that wind farm development was technically feasible, economically beneficial, and aligned with Norway's sustainability targets (Doc 24, 26, 84). Based on these assessments and arguments, the candidate municipalities also supported the project.

Already prior to 2006, Fosen's Sámi communities (6 families) raised concerns about reindeer herding. Consultations were held as part of impact assessment processes led by the MoE, NVE and Statkraft. In the oldest document publicly available (Doc 23), the Sámi's concerns appear as a short discussion of co-location with pasture areas. Their main concern was the loss of vital grazing pastures essential to herding for generations. They saw this as an infringement on their cultural rights and traditional way of life, rights they argued should not be compromised by sustainability goals.

The promoters' belief that ecologically sustainable energy production was desirable and justified, and the Sámi's belief that their cultural rights needed to be protected, resulted in a clear value conflict: the values of sustainability and cultural rights, though both legitimate, could not be simultaneously realised. To address the Sámi's concerns, NVE arranged consultation meetings and conducted multiple impact assessments on the effects on reindeer husbandry. The scale and scope was slightly reduced, and development plans were adjusted to limit consequences. For example, some planned roads were relocated and the southern planning area was reduced (Doc 21, 84). This illustrates how the Sámi's engagement influenced the project's outcomes with marginally reduced supporting infrastructure construction and adaptation of reindeer-migration routes for lower harm. Throughout the licensing process, Statkraft and the MoE emphasised that the studies and adjustments would compensate for the Sámi's potential loss of pastureland, and that the Fosen project is essential to achieve the national sustainability goals, an argument that sustained the project's legitimacy and initiation momentum.

From the Sámi's standpoint, although the families participated in some meetings, their involvement remained marginal. Across project documents, the reindeer herding issue was treated as peripheral by the project sponsor and framed as a minor component of broader land-use considerations. The promoter assumed that mitigation measures and technical adjustments would enable coexistence between the wind farms and traditional herding practices (Doc 7, 8). For instance, Supplementary Environmental Impact Assessment Report (Doc 43) suggested that impacts could be managed through minor layout or turbine adjustments. While documents acknowledged possible effects, they lacked in-depth assessment of the socio-economic and cultural consequences. Instead, the focus remained on short-term technical issues such as construction, noise, and infrastructure (Docs 26, 19, 34, 95). In one of the reports (Doc 41) from 2008, Statkraft states:

"The planned technical interventions in the form of wind turbines, roads and power lines will entail direct and indirect loss of grazing land. Direct

loss of grazing land to built-up areas and land which is reallocated to, for example, road or installation sites for cranes. Indirect lost area are the immediate areas of the development (...) The extent of indirect land loss is difficult to calculate and is assessed based on research studies on the reindeer's behaviour in the face of technical interventions and human traffic. The knowledge of the effects of wind turbines on the reindeer is lacking as of today, but most completed studies, and the preliminary results of an ongoing study of reindeer in Kjøllefjord in Finnmark, suggest that reindeer in the influence area of wind power plants do not deviate significantly from normal behaviour."

Multiple reports concluded that the effects of the project would be manageable with terrain adaptations and mitigation measures to minimise disruptions to reindeer land use. Following these findings, NVE reviewed the project proposal, approved it, and granted the concession in 2013. In a concession document, NVE underscores:

"Through the renewable energy directive and the creation of a common electricity-certificate market, Norway has with Sweden committed to significantly increasing the development of renewable energy (...) wind power and hydropower are the two energy carriers that can make a significant contribution to this context. The potential of wind power is significant, as Norway has both good wind resources and large areas. Wind power will therefore be central to the achievement of Norway's renewable ambitions." (Doc 19)

This shows that the project's promoter follows and argues for national sustainability priorities. The neglect to fully acknowledge the Sámi's arguments and oppositions during the licensing process led to growing concerns within the Sámi community and they submitted a formal complaint to the MoE in 2013. The complaint was rejected on the grounds that the project was deemed essential for achieving Norway's sustainability targets and that its impact on reindeer husbandry would be minor and compensable. MoE approved the project and formally appointed Statkraft as the project developer.

The promoters' actions throughout licensing relied on consequential reasoning (impact assessments, terrain adaptations, compensability arguments), treating the conflict as a worth-based conflict manageable through technical adjustments. The Sámi's concerns, however, were rooted in beliefs about their cultural rights that such measures could not address. By deferring beliefs-rooted opposition to future stages, the licensing process displaced the conflict, setting the conditions for its accumulation.

4.2. Detailed planning stage (2013–2016)

After the MoE rejected the Sámi appeal (Doc 20, 84) and concerns continued, several meetings were held with herders between 2013 and 2016 to discuss mitigation measures. Construction-phase measures were reviewed, and licensed requirements were followed up through technical inspections. This indicates that the underlying value conflict influenced short-term project outcomes, such as monitoring and consultation mechanisms.

In 2015, Statkraft's evaluations concluded that the project was not economically viable due to low electricity prices, lack of support schemes, and uncertainty in the European energy market. This assessment coincided with Norway's Paris Agreement commitment to reduce emissions by at least 40% by 2030. After rapid shifts in Statkraft's internal directives and new financial incentives from the MoE, the project was approved in 2016. Political determination for promoting the Fosen project shows how promoters' emphasis on Norway's sustainability goals materialised in the project progressing consistent with its original justification. That the national sustainability priorities were a clear force pushing the project forward was also mentioned by one of our interviewees:

"There was a Statkraft board discussion suggesting that the Fosen project was not profitable. Nevertheless, under strong political will for the green

energy transition, it was decided in February 2016 that the project was still profitable. Yet this is highly questionable: if an area is destroyed, what is the true cost of lost nature and of the human rights being violated?" (Informant N.N)

At the same time, Sámi reindeer herders refused to discuss specific mitigation measures before an investment decision was made. They felt that their involvement was minimal and confined to narrow technical issues and viewed the consultations insufficient and unresponsive to core human rights issues. Because their concerns about violations of Sámi cultural and livelihood rights remained unaddressed throughout the planning stage (Doc 10) and the project advanced largely according to its original justification, demonstrations were initiated. This shows how the value conflict further materialised through concrete activities.

The planning stage extended the pattern of deferral. Although meetings were held and mitigation measures discussed, consultations addressed technical impacts rather than underlying beliefs about cultural rights. The Sámi's refusal to engage in narrow technical discussions signals a different evaluative stance — one that consequential reasoning could not accommodate. Each stage of procedural engagement that left core beliefs unaddressed deepened the opposition's conviction that meaningful recognition was being refused.

4.3. Construction and operation stage (2016–2020)

Construction began in 2016, and the last turbine was installed in 2020, overlapping several legal actions by Sámi families. Since 2014, when Fosen Vind and Statnett sought expropriation for the Roan and Storheia wind farms, the Sámi, particularly Sør-Fosen sijte, argued that the Storheia licence violated Article 27 of the ICCPR on minority cultural rights. In 2017, the District Court concluded that Storheia did not restrict reindeer husbandry severely enough to breach Article 27 and allowed the petition to proceed, while ruling on compensation. Subsequent appeals were dismissed as premature. A construction-phase agreement regulated subsidies and compensation for impacts on herding, and the project proceeded largely as planned.

During construction, Statkraft implemented mitigation measures including clearing migration routes to alternative winter grazing areas, with over 50 inspections, meetings, and home visits (Doc 33, 36, 84). These reflected Statkraft's focus on technical adjustments, shaping both intermediate outcomes (reduced harm to herding, improved institutional learning on Indigenous consultation) and long-term outcomes (supporting decarbonisation while limiting cultural and livelihood impacts). Nevertheless, the conflict persisted. Sámi groups felt their fundamental concerns about cultural rights and human rights continued to be overlooked, viewing consultations as one-way briefings rather than genuine dialogue. Meetings often required basic explanations, leaving little room for substantive discussion. The Sámi repeatedly stressed that the project restricts access to essential pastures, threatening both current and future traditional-herding, and expressed frustration that their culture and rights were not meaningfully recognised.

In 2017, the 100th anniversary of the first national Sámi meeting, commemorated by Prime Minister Solberg and King Harald V, brought greater public attention to the Sámi families' legal dispute over the wind farm. The case, led primarily by Sør-Fosen sijte with Nord-Fosen siida also involved, moved through the District Court, Court of Appeal, and toward the Supreme Court. In 2018, the District Court reviewed the project's rights acquisitions (permanent/temporary/access), infrastructure, and compensation framework in relation to Sámi cultural and human rights, ordering compensation that both parties appealed. The Sámi groups viewed it as insufficient and irrelevant, the developer as excessive. This phase illustrates how the underlying value conflict, rooted in incompatible evaluative stances rather than differing assessments of project costs and benefits, affected the project trajectory. The Sámi subsequently appealed to the Court of Appeal. As Statkraft continued construction, the sight of excavators in the mountains led the

six families to escalate to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. In 2018, the UN urged Norway to halt the project under its interim measures procedure, but the Ministry refused, citing national sovereignty. In 2019, additional measures were introduced to reduce traffic in the wind farm area. While awaiting the Court of Appeal's decision, the Sámi continued to highlight the conflict through demonstrations, media engagement, and public statements, reinforcing their view that the project imposed significant burdens on their cultural rights. In June 2020, the Court of Appeal upheld the licences and ruled that compensation had been adequately addressed, ordering the developer to pay each community compensation for adaptation and lost income (Doc 65, 70).

From the promoter's perspective, the legal dispute prompted stronger focus on reindeer husbandry assessments, particularly regarding migration and grazing, along with more advanced environmental studies and regulatory consultations (Doc 33, 48, 49), including joint impact assessment plans. The documents also show a more structured approach to meeting legal and environmental obligations, such as joint impact assessment plans. However, the Sámi remained dissatisfied, as their human rights concerns were overshadowed by the emphasis on national sustainability goals. They argued that cumulative impacts, expanded turbine areas, and extended construction timelines threatened their ability to maintain traditional practices, impacts that proposed measures could not compensate. The project was experienced as a "bit-by-bit" expansion increasingly encroaching on vital grazing areas (Doc 10). The Sámi families continued public advocacy and appealed the Court of Appeal's decision to the Supreme Court in November 2020. Notably, Sámi engagement in opposing Fosen led to several other wind power projects being paused or cancelled between 2019 and 2021 on Sámi rights grounds. This illustrates how the conflict generated institutional consequences extending beyond the project itself.

The construction stage made the accumulated deferral substantially visible. While earlier stages had displaced the beliefs-rooted conflict through procedural means, the physical presence of turbines on contested land rendered further deferral impossible. The escalation from domestic courts to the UN Committee illustrates how accumulated, unaddressed beliefs-rooted conflict does not dissolve but intensifies, seeking new arenas of expression. The promoters' continued reliance on technical mitigation, including over 50 inspections, route adjustments, and compensation proposals, further demonstrates the mismatch between consequential responses and deontological oppositions.

4.4. Post-closure stage (2021 and after)

In October 2021, the Supreme Court assessed whether the wind farm developments violated Article 27 of the ICCPR, Section 108 of the Norwegian Constitution, and CERD; whether reindeer herders could assert these rights collectively; and whether expropriation rulings and compensation proceedings should be overturned. The Court issued a historic decision in favour of the Sámi, recognising reindeer herding as a collective cultural practice and affirming that Sámi groups may claim related rights collectively. It ruled that the developments unlawfully infringed Sámi cultural rights, invalidating the concession and expropriation decisions, stating that the Storheia and Roan projects were built on unlawful grounds (Doc 60). The Court firmly concluded that key mitigation measures conflicted with Sámi practices and that Indigenous cultural rights cannot be overridden by environmental policy goals or economic gains like renewable energy production.

The 2021 ruling produced negative consequences for the project owner and authorities, lasting harm to Sámi culture and livelihoods, and reputational damage. At the same time, the conflict generated important institutional learning on Indigenous consultation and rights compliance, and strengthened the public voice of the Sámi. A symbolic example is the decision of Sámi representatives to attend Supreme Court hearings in traditional dress (Samisk kofte) as a visible assertion of cultural identity. According to an expert environmental leader with six decades of

experience in the Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature, such expressions mark a significant shift from earlier decades when Sámi participants did not appear in traditional clothing. A change reinforced by the Fosen case.

While the Supreme Court confirmed the project's unlawfulness, it did not decide what to do with the existing turbines. The MoE initiated a process to revise the concessions, including new investigations and a timeline to protect reindeer herders' rights. Fosen Vind provided winter emergency support in 2021, opened dialogue with the herders, and in 2022 proposed an updated impact assessment plan with mitigation and compensation measures. Through 2022–2023, the company maintained regular dialogue, provided support during difficult grazing periods,

offered interim land-use compensation, and participated in mediation with the State. These post-ruling steps reflected an effort to address opponents' requirements and repair the project's compromised outcome. For the Sámi, the ruling initially raised hopes for meaningful change, yet progress remained limited (Doc 15), increasing impatience beyond the six affected families. In 2023, a prominent Sámi artist staged a protest in Trondheim, the bishop of Nidaros Cathedral criticised the government's handling of the turbines (Doc 10), and the Sámi president joined youth activists demonstrating at the MoE. As one young herder expressed: "I have a fear of the future... It's what I love and want to continue doing... One must have a good psyche to go out in the media and defend one's way of life" (Doc 9). By the end of 2023, Sør-Fosen

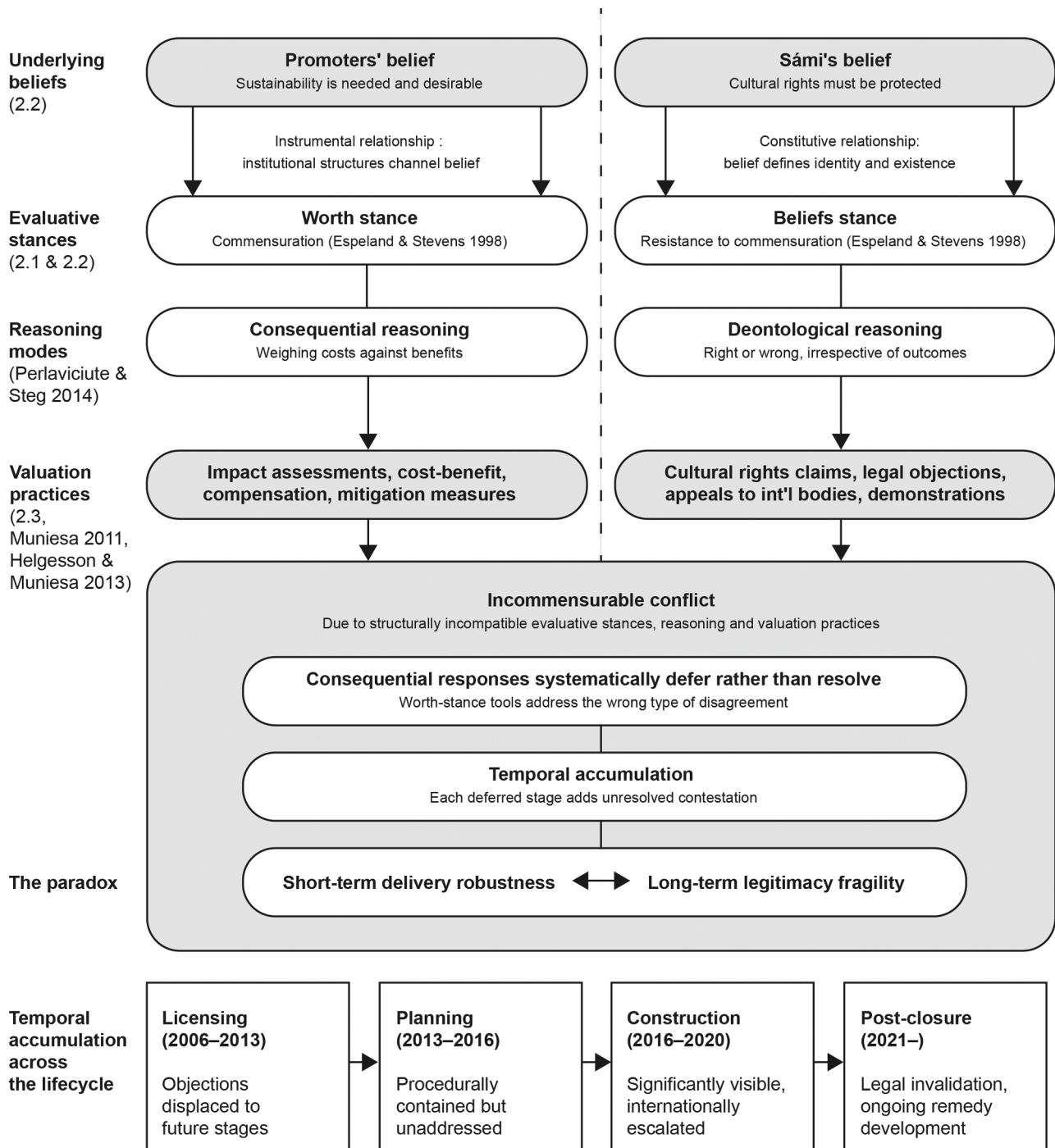


Fig. 1. Analytical model of beliefs-rooted value conflict and temporal accumulation in the Fosen wind project.

sijte, Fosen Vind, and the State reached a compensation agreement intended to support both reindeer husbandry and wind power. In March 2024, a similar agreement was concluded with Nord-Fosen siida. Nevertheless, acceptable long-term solutions to secure the Sámi's ability to continue reindeer husbandry in Fosen have yet to be established, meaning that the incommensurable core is left unresolved: the turbines remained on land the Supreme Court had declared unlawfully conceded, and the Sámi's right to continue herding undisturbed was not restored.

The Supreme Court's 2021 ruling crystallised the consequences of accumulated deferral. By affirming that Indigenous cultural rights cannot be overridden by societal interests such as climate mitigation, the Court validated the deontological standing of beliefs the promoters had treated as negotiable throughout the project. What had appeared as successful delivery was revealed as accumulated, unresolved contestation. The post-ruling period further illustrates this: compensation negotiations and public advocacy remain necessary precisely because the underlying beliefs were never substantively engaged.

Together, the four stages reveal a dynamic of temporal accumulation: beliefs-rooted conflict met with consequential reasoning and procedural deferral does not diminish but compounds. Each stage added unresolved contestation, from displaced oppositions during licensing, through procedurally contained but substantively unaddressed concerns during planning, to substantially visible and internationally escalated opposition during construction, and ultimately to legal invalidation and ongoing remediation after closure. This produced a central paradox: the project did indeed achieve short-term delivery robustness by deferring the beliefs-rooted conflict, yet this deferral generated the long-term fragility that undermined the project's legitimacy and outcomes.

5. Discussion and contributions

This paper asked how beliefs-rooted value conflicts manifest in project processes and shape outcomes over time. The Fosen case reveals that when actors holding fundamentally different beliefs (here about national sustainability versus Indigenous cultural rights) engage in a project together, the resulting conflict operates differently from worth-rooted value conflicts documented in project studies. Standard approaches grounded in consequential reasoning systematically deferred rather than resolved this conflict, producing what we identify as temporal accumulation: each stage of procedural engagement that left beliefs unaddressed added to unresolved contestation. The result was a paradox: short-term delivery robustness achieved through deferral generated long-term fragility that undermined the project's legitimacy (Table 2). We develop three contributions: a conceptual distinction between worth-rooted and beliefs-rooted value conflicts mapping onto different analytical stances (Section 5.1); an empirical account of temporal accumulation (Section 5.2); and a methodological argument for valuation practices as traces of beliefs-rooted conflict (Section 5.3). Fig. 1 synthesises the three contributions discussed below.

5.1. Beliefs-rooted value conflict as a distinct analytical category

The project management literature has extensively studied how competing dimensions of project worth create conflicts that shape project processes and outcomes (Martinsuo et al., 2019; Zerjav et al., 2021). A smaller but important stream has shown that conflicts rooted in competing beliefs and institutional logics prove more persistent and resistant to resolution (Kuitert et al., 2023; Van Den Ende & van Marrewijk, 2019). Our study contributes by distinguishing analytically between these two types: worth-rooted value conflicts, which operate within the worth perspective and are agreeable to consequential reasoning, and beliefs-rooted value conflicts, which invoke deontological reasoning (Perlaviciute & Steg, 2014). This distinction (Section 2; Table 5 in Appendix) is not merely conceptual: it maps onto qualitatively different actions, handling approaches, and crucially, fundamentally different consequences for projects, as the Fosen case makes concrete.

In the worth perspective, actors evaluate projects through consequential reasoning — weighing costs against benefits, assessing trade-offs, and negotiating compensations. The extensive literature on stakeholder management (e.g., (Ninan et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2019), social acceptance (Raudasjoja et al., 2025), and stakeholder engagement and value co-creation (Aaltonen et al., 2024; Rodhouse et al., 2023)) operates largely within this perspective, presupposing that actors share a common evaluative stance in which trade-offs are structurally possible. The Fosen promoters operated consistently here: impact assessments, terrain adaptations, compensability arguments, and consultation meetings all represent consequential responses to what was treated as a worth-rooted conflict. However, the promoters' pursuit was itself grounded in belief: an institutional logic in which renewable energy development constitutes legitimate and necessary action toward sustainability, reinforced by regulatory frameworks, political commitments, and organisational norms that made it clear to organisational actors that the project is desirable and should proceed. Both promoters and opponents held rooted beliefs; the analytical difference lies in how these were enacted: through consequential reasoning embedded in institutional structures on the promoters' side, and deontological reasoning grounded in communal-cultural identity on the Sámi's side.

The Sámi's engagement illustrates deontological reasoning (Perlaviciute & Steg, 2014), judging the project as wrong irrespective of its outcomes. Their refusal to discuss mitigation before the investment decision, escalation to the UN Committee, and the Supreme Court's affirmation that cultural rights cannot be balanced against sustainability goals all show the conflict operating in a fundamentally different evaluative stance. MacArthur and Matthewman (2018) and Velasco-Herrejón et al. (2022) describe this as a confrontation between competing normative orders, not a disagreement about costs and benefits.

When actors' evaluations are anchored in competing beliefs rather than competing interests, the conflict can become structurally incommensurable, not a disagreement about the distribution of worth but about the evaluative framework through which worth is established (cf., (Kuitert et al., 2023; Martinsuo, 2020; Whyte et al., 2026)). The Fosen case gives concrete empirical content to this dynamic, which has largely been absent from project studies. Existing frameworks, including Van Den Ende and van Marrewijk's (2019) legitimisation approaches and Kuitert et al. (2023) coping patterns, implicitly capture important dynamics but do not analytically separate the two perspectives or explain why certain conflicts resist resolution attempts. Our distinction offers this explanation: worth-perspective tools fail not because they are poorly implemented but because they address a different type of disagreement and presuppose a shared evaluative framework that deontological reasoning from constitutive beliefs bypasses (cf., (MacArthur & Matthewman, 2018; Whyte, 2023)), revealing dimensions of conflict — incommensurability, persistence across institutional arenas, resistance to standard engagement — invisible through the worth perspective alone.

Recent work demonstrates that collaborative value creation in sustainability programmes can operate effectively through joint projecting among actors who share a broad commitment to the transition (Bos-de Vos et al., 2025), and that moral reflexivity can mediate ethical tensions in project networks by enabling organisations to adjust goals through reflexive sensemaking (Liu & Zhang, 2025). Such mechanisms, however, presuppose that actors operate within the same institutional-organisational perspective, where disagreements concern how to distribute value, not whether the undertaking itself is legitimate. The Fosen case reveals where this breaks down: the Sámi's communal-cultural beliefs about reindeer herding, land, and identity are not goals that can be adjusted in exchange for collective benefit. They constitute the very framework through which the project's legitimacy is evaluated. No amount of reflexive sensemaking or collaborative projecting can bridge a conflict in which one party's constitutive beliefs render the project fundamentally illegitimate.

5.2. Temporal accumulation: how deferral intensifies beliefs-rooted conflict

Our second contribution is that we empirically identify a dynamic of temporal accumulation through which beliefs-rooted value conflict intensifies across the project lifecycle. The project management literature has recognised that value dynamics unfold over time. Bos-de Vos et al. (2019) document value slippage between project phases, Kuitert et al. (2023) identify temporal coping patterns including deferral, prolongation, and anticipation, and Whyte et al. (2026) show that communities' value-systems are deeply embedded and persistent, mobilising different interpretations of pasts and futures that leave groups without common evaluative stance. Our findings extend these insights by tracing how deferral operates as an intensifying mechanism when the underlying conflict is rooted in beliefs rather than worth.

Importantly, this conflict did not originate within the project itself. In line with Engwall (2003), who argues that projects must be understood in relation to the wider contexts they are embedded in, the Fosen conflict was imported into the project from a broader historical and institutional landscape. The Sámi's cultural rights claims precede the wind energy development and are anchored in longstanding Indigenous rights struggles. This matters analytically because it is part of the explanation for why project-level consequential tools proved structurally insufficient. They were designed to manage tensions arising from project decisions, not to engage a conflict whose roots lie outside the project boundary.

Across the four project stages (Table 2), a consistent dynamic emerged: consequential responses displaced beliefs-rooted oppositions to future stages, where they intensified rather than resolved. During licensing and planning, technical adjustments and consultation meetings addressed the conflict as a tension over worth, while the Sámi's core beliefs about protection of their cultural rights as right and desirable outcomes remained unengaged. During construction, the accumulated deferral became centrally visible. The conflict escalated to domestic courts, the UN Committee, and public demonstrations. In the post-closure stage, the Supreme Court's ruling crystallised the consequences: what had appeared as successful delivery was revealed as a container of accumulated, unresolved contestation. The 2024 agreements, providing compensation and grazing arrangements, and the broader governance reconfigurations that followed, demonstrate how accumulated beliefs-rooted conflict produces post-completion outcomes that are legal, political, and institutional, not just adjustments to project delivery.

This temporal accumulation dynamic adds a critical dimension to existing accounts. Where Kuitert et al. (2023) identify deferral as one coping pattern among several, our analysis shows that for beliefs-rooted conflicts, deferral does not manage but intensifies the conflict. Each round of procedural engagement without substantive recognition deepens the opposition's belief that meaningful engagement is being refused or ineffective. Where Bos-de Vos et al. (2019) show that value slippage between phases can be managed through portfolio compensation, our case demonstrates that such management works only within the worth perspective. When beliefs are at stake, slippage can become accumulation. Where Whyte et al. (2026) document incompatible evaluations rooted in contrasting value-systems, the Fosen case shows that these incompatibilities deepen over time rather than stabilise or resolve. Each round of consequential engagement compounds deontological resistance rather than absorbing it. And where Van den Ende and van Marrewijk (2019) show that legitimisation approaches succeed one another as accumulated resistance renders each prior approach insufficient — a pattern this study calls temporal accumulation — the Fosen case extends this dynamic: each consequential response to Sámi opposition did not contribute to neutralising the conflict but inherited and intensified it, as the employed approach was structurally incompatible with what the opposing actors understood as legitimate engagement.

The accumulation produced a paradox central to understanding

projects with beliefs-rooted conflicts: the project achieved short-term delivery robustness by deferring the beliefs-rooted conflict, yet this same deferral generated the long-term fragility that ultimately undermined the project's legitimacy and outcomes. This challenges Van Den Ende and van Marrewijk's (2019) finding that community resistance, while initially disrupting project progress, ultimately catalysed institutional transformation toward more inclusive approaches — though Van den Ende and van Marrewijk caution that an amalgamation of all three approaches they identified remained necessary and no single approach proved sufficient on its own. In the Fosen case, the absence of such early disruption masked the accumulation of unresolved contestation. The beliefs were institutionally anchored. The Sámi's resistance was not ad hoc opposition but was embedded in institutionally recognised cultural rights that ultimately gained legal force. This suggests Van den Ende and van Marrewijk's finding is bounded to conflicts operating within the worth perspective, where evolving legitimisation strategies can gain traction, but not to conflicts rooted in constitutive beliefs, where each legitimisation attempt that fails to recognise the different evaluative stance compounds rather than resolves the conflict. This institutional anchoring explains why the accumulated conflict in Fosen project did not dissolve but crystallised into a legitimacy crisis, with consequences extending beyond the project itself to regulatory frameworks and future project governance (Rioux-Gobeil & Thomassin, 2024).

5.3. Valuation practices as traces of beliefs-rooted conflict

Our third contribution is methodological. Valuation practices, namely what actors concretely do to establish, assess, and contest project worth, serve as empirically traceable markers of the evaluative stances underpinning beliefs-rooted conflict (Espeland & Stevens, 1998; Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013; Muniesa, 2011), with commensuration signalling consequential reasoning and resistance to commensuration signalling deontological reasoning. This translates an abstract analytical distinction into observable, analysable activities, and addresses a challenge in project studies: beliefs are often treated as abstract or unmeasurable, making it difficult to trace their influence on project processes and outcomes (Martinsuo, 2020).

In the Fosen case, the two perspectives of value (worth and belief) manifested in distinct valuation practices. The promoters' practices (e.g., environmental impact assessments, cost-benefit analyses, technical feasibility studies, compensation frameworks) enacted commensuration (Espeland & Stevens, 1998) by rendering various impacts comparable through common metrics, and consequential reasoning by rendering impacts into negotiable quantities. The Sámi's practices (e.g., formal complaints raising cultural rights, appeals to international human rights bodies, public demonstrations in traditional dress, legal arguments) enacted deontological reasoning by resisting commensuration and emphasising that certain values cannot be traded or compensated. Traced across the project lifecycle, valuation practices show that beliefs-rooted conflicts manifest in concrete decisions and accumulate into outcomes, which is a move from abstract beliefs' to observable, analysable activities.

This analytical lens proved useful not as a separate theoretical framework but as the lens that makes the beliefs perspective empirically observable and the beliefs-worth distinction empirically tractable. Tracing how actors categorise project impacts (as commensurable quantities or as incommensurable rights (Espeland & Stevens, 1998) reveals the evaluative stances within which they operate. The approach is transferable: in contested project contexts, tracing divergent valuation practices can reveal whether actors operate within a shared evaluative stance or whether conflict is rooted in fundamentally different beliefs. It therefore identifies the type of conflict, rather than merely its presence.

5.4. Practical implications

The findings carry implications for governing projects involving

potential beliefs-rooted contestation. First, project feasibility assessments should explicitly distinguish between worth-rooted and beliefs-rooted value conflicts. As shown, standard risk assessment and stakeholder analysis operate within the worth perspective and may systematically underestimate beliefs-rooted opposition. Recognising this distinction early — before commitments become irreversible — is critical, as deferral intensifies rather than manages such conflicts. The Fosen promoters consistently interpreted Sámi resistance as a negotiable concern about impacts rather than an expression of constitutive cultural beliefs, underscoring the need for approaches that surface the evaluative stances within which opposition operates, not only its stated content.

Second, conventional stakeholder engagement proves inadequate when conflict is rooted in deeply held beliefs rather than negotiable interests. In Fosen, consultations framed Sámi concerns as technical impacts to be managed rather than expressions of fundamentally different beliefs. Engagement processes that do not recognise conflicting beliefs as legitimate may sustain or intensify conflict over time.

Third, value conflict should be managed continuously throughout the project lifecycle. Even after Fosen's completion, the conflict continued to shape outcomes through legal rulings and societal debate. In contexts involving fundamental rights, continued progress without considering alternatives (e.g., including substantial redesign or project abandonment) increases the risk of long-term consequences extending beyond the focal project.

5.5. Limitations and future research

Our study has limitations that point to future research. First, we traced beliefs and their enactment without foregrounding power differentials. We acknowledge that beliefs-rooted conflicts are shaped by power dynamics and strategic actions operating differently across the two perspectives: through resource control and procedural advantage in the worth perspective, and through the ability to define whose beliefs are recognised as legitimate in the beliefs perspective (cf., (Rioux-Gobeil & Thomassin, 2024)). Examining how power dynamics shape the temporal accumulation of beliefs-rooted conflict is a direction for future research.

Second, our findings are based on a single case relying mainly on secondary documents supplemented by interviews. While Fosen-case offers longitudinal richness, future research should examine whether temporal accumulation operates similarly in other contested projects, including outside Indigenous contexts, such as urban redevelopment or heritage preservation where competing beliefs about place and identity are at stake (cf., (Van Den Ende & van Marrewijk, 2019)).

Third, we traced how beliefs-rooted conflicts intensify when met with consequential reasoning. An important question is whether such conflicts can be substantively engaged — what forms of recognition, governance, or institutional design might interrupt accumulation (cf., (MacArthur & Matthewman, 2018; Velasco-Herrejón et al., 2022)). Future research should also examine the micro-political conditions under which value conflicts materialise, and how the interplay between the two perspectives shapes broader institutional and regulatory landscapes.

AI declaration

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Claude (Anthropic) as a sparring partner in developing and strengthening the theoretical argument and for proofreading the manuscript text. The authors carefully reviewed and edited all input generated by AI before taking it into account in the paper and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

Funding information

No specific funding was received to support the research presented in

this manuscript.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Parinaz Farid: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Marina Bos-de Vos:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Vedran Zerjav:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Acknowledgements

We express our gratitude to the interviewees for sharing their practices, experiences, and insights, and to all those from The Courts of Norway who facilitated our access to documents related to the Fosen project's legal processes. We also thank the participants of the Project Business Workshop in September 2024 for their helpful discussions and suggestions on the earliest version of this paper. Finally, we are grateful to the organisers, the three anonymous reviewers, and the discussant of our session in the EURAM 2025 track on Project and Society for their invaluable feedback.

Supplementary materials

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at [doi:10.1016/j.ijproman.2026.102900](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2026.102900).

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