

The politics of Estonia's offshore wind energy programme: Discourse, power and marine spatial planning

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journals.sagepub.com/home/epc**Ralph Tafon**

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Abstract

There is growing recognition that marine spatial planning is an inherently political process marked by a clash of discourses, power and conflicts of interest. Yet, there are very few attempts to make sense of and explain the political practices of marine spatial planning protests in different contexts, especially the way that planners and developers create the conditions for the articulation of objections, and then develop new strategies to negotiate and mediate community resistance. Using poststructuralist discourse theory, the article analyses the politics of a proposed offshore wind energy project in Estonia within the context of the country's marine spatial planning processes. First, through the lens of politicization, it explores the strategies of political mobilization and the rival discourses of expertise and sustainability through which residents and municipal actors have contested the offshore wind energy project. Secondly, through the lens of depoliticization, it explains the discursive and legalistic strategies employed by developers, planners and an Administrative Court to displace – spatially and temporally – the core issues of contestation, thus legitimizing the offshore wind energy plan. We argue that the spaces created by the pre-planning conjuncture offered the most conducive conditions for residents to voice concerns about the proposed project in a dialogical fashion, whereas the marine spatial planning and post-planning phases became mired in a therapeutic-style consultation, set alongside rigid and

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unreflexive interpretations and applications of legality. We conclude by setting out the limits of the Estonian marine spatial planning as a process for resolving conflicts, while offering an alternative model of handling such public controversies, which we call pragmatic adversarialism.

Keywords

Marine spatial planning, politicization and depoliticization, discourse theory and power, offshore wind energy conflict, discourses and resistance strategies

For the last decade or so, marine spatial planning (MSP) has been heralded as a way of managing the disputes that arise from the ongoing exploitation of marine resources. As an avowedly deliberative and participatory planning process designed to offset the fragmented governance of the seas, a key objective of MSP is to generate more effective decision-making that can better ‘balance’ the competing demands on marine resources and the need to protect the sustainability of the marine environment (EC, 2008). Embodying the modernist discourse of rational technocratic planning (Flannery et al., 2016), it encourages planners to engage in a series of steps, ranging from data collection and stakeholder consultation through to the participatory development of a strategic plan and its implementation, evaluation and revision.

Proponents of MSP argue that in following such steps, stakeholder engagement complements existing sources of knowledge and adds to the transparency of decision-making, thereby increasing trust among stakeholders and the acceptance, support and ownership of plans (EC, 2008: 9). Indeed, the rhetoric of MSP repeatedly extols the virtues of ‘integrating’ competing demands, avoiding or resolving conflicts, while foregrounding the values of scientific evidence and ‘full information’ as a means of addressing value clashes (EC, 2008: 11; Flannery et al., 2016: 129–131). In short, MSP is often presented as a suitable means of engaging all affected actors and negotiating better solutions to deal with wicked issues.

Yet, there is also considerable debate as to whether or not MSP is an effective or sufficiently radical governance mechanism in dealing with the complex issues and implications raised by the dominant logics of economic growth and its distributive implications in the marine environment. Critics question its complicity with market logics, which relegate environmental and other concerns to a secondary position and point to its failure to address some of the *epistemological* and *value* dimensions of such conflicts. For these critics, then, MSP is a variant of ‘post-political’ planning, whose main purpose is to marginalize opposition and domesticate power struggles in the name of neo-liberal forms of governmentality (Flannery et al., 2016: 129–131; Tafon, 2017).

Our article addresses these complexities by exploring the *relational* and *contingent* character of wind energy contestations and their associated power mechanisms in Estonia’s MSP processes. We examine the emergence and evolution of a particular offshore wind energy (OWE) conflict: the plan to construct an offshore wind farm project in Hiiumaa in Estonia. The project started in 2006, and its subsequent actualization and enduring local opposition casts doubt on the effectiveness of the European Union’s process of MSP. In characterizing and evaluating the logic and implementation of MSP in this critical case, we analyse the endeavours of residents and those enmeshed in the planning process to reach a reasonable and practical consensus. We thus bring to light the rival sustainability discourses and power mechanisms, which have been articulated by differentially positioned stakeholders in their

efforts to challenge and/or stabilize the proposed OWE initiative and highlight the tensions and limits of MSP as a governance device.

Our approach builds on second-generation debates on depoliticization (Wood and Flinders, 2014) to develop a dialectical conceptualization of the politics of the planning process at Hiiumaa, which focuses on the logics and strategies employed by actors to contest (politicize) and decontest (depoliticize) controversial issues and decisions. We employ this approach to characterize and explain the different manifestations of power operating in the Hiiumaa OWE/MSP processes, as well as the outcomes that have emerged. We thus explore how differently positioned social actors both *symbolize* and *respond* to the dislocatory events engendered by the Hiiumaa OWE/MSP process, so that our account focuses on the contingent *character* of planning relations and their constitutive practices, as well as the *outcomes* that they produce.

Viewed through the lens of politicization (though set against practices of depoliticization), we first explain the *emergence* and *character* of a resistance *subjectivity* amongst Hiiumaa residents. We also chart their attendant political practices, as they sought to challenge and destabilize key environmental, social and economic claims associated with the OWE proposal, while destabilizing the marine plan that gave the project legal backing. But, secondly, when framed by the logics of depoliticization, we capture the governmental ‘technologies’ and discursive logics through which MSP authorities, OWE promoters and legal institutions sought to dismantle challenges to the proposal. Our article contributes to emerging criticisms of MSP, which assert that it is little more than a strategic planning process designed to legitimize and stabilize powerful sectoral schemes (Jones et al., 2016). Rather than offering a truly deliberative process, we contend that in reality MSP forms an apparatus of practices that aims to depoliticize issues of deep contestation, which are often inflected with a strong normative component.

Such concerns are reflected in the structuring of our article. The first section sets out our theoretical approach and its operationalization, while the second sets the scene by discussing the circumstances that led to the rollout of MSP at Hiiumaa and its eventual contestation. The next two sections analyse the complex discursive and programmatic ways in which *politics* played out in Hiiumaa OWE/MSP social relations and sets out the outcomes of the interactions. The fifth and sixth substantive parts revisit the case and conclude by teasing out some challenges of participatory MSP as a process for ‘balancing’ conflicting interests in what is a fundamentally undecided terrain. We conclude by outlining our alternative proposal for dealing with such issues in a more just and democratic fashion.

Power, discourse and the politics of planning

There is a growing consensus that MSP is an inherently political process. Yet there is little understanding of how politics unfurls itself in different contexts, and the outcomes that arise. In addressing this lacuna, we draw upon poststructuralist discourse theory to explain the complex forms of collective action engaged in by residents at Hiiumaa and the manifold manifestations of power in Estonia’s process of MSP. Put succinctly, our concept of discourse contains *six* related dimensions. First, discourse is primarily a social practice that hooks together and resignifies elements into relational systems. Secondly, the condition for such articulatory practices is that all elements, whether natural, cultural, physical or linguistic, are *radically contingent*. This means that they have no fixed essence or full identity, but can be constructed and reinterpreted in different ways by competing forces. Thirdly, the articulation of contingent elements into the *moments* of a discourse yields certain systems or orders of meaning. Because they involve forms of power that exclude certain elements,

such orders are always incomplete and marked by an outside. Fourthly, the overall meaning of discourses is partly determined by the role of *nodal points* and *empty signifiers*, which are privileged moments of organization (nodal points) and signification (empty signifiers) in a discourse. Their function is to fuse together elements and differences, thus conferring a partially fixed identity. Fifthly, the construction of discourses occurs in a particular *space* – fields of discursivity – although no discourse can completely exhaust its meanings and possibilities. Finally, *subjects* are positioned within discourses, and not at the origin of things, although room is made for political agency, especially in moments of crisis and dislocation, when they may construct antagonistic relations with ‘others’ that are believed to block their identities and interests (Howarth, 2013; Laclau, 1995).

Building on this ‘ontology of discord’, it follows that planning decisions and processes are not immunized from politics, nor are disputes likely to yield a rational consensus or a technocratic resolution. On the contrary, they are increasingly the sites of intense conflict and acrimony. Of course, this has been recognized in many studies in recent times. Nevertheless, the precise political dynamics and logics of these complicated practices still admit of further reflection, as well as theoretical and empirical development. We thus develop the dialectics of politicization and depoliticization to capture power and exclusion as fundamental and irreducible components of the decision-making process. Drawing on our underlying presuppositions, it follows that practices of (de)politicization are both articulatory and symbolic, as they involve the linking together of contingent elements, where the identities of such components are modified by the practice in question. Indeed, strategies of (de)politicization are intimately connected to what we shall call the primacy of politics, which captures the way in which a social relation or system is contested, instituted and transformed.

More precisely, the moment of politics is the point at which a relation, policy or institution is challenged in the name of an alternative ideal or rule. Put differently, politics consists in reactivating the founding moments of a practice or institution, and the proposal of new ways of doing things, although such reactivations do not always assume the same forms and terms evident in their original emergence and constitution. Moreover, if we adopt a definition of politics that is not confined to a particular space, such as government or the state, nor simply a particular process, such as public decision-making or the distribution of goods, but a fundamental dimension of societies themselves, then it potentially intrudes into all arenas of social relations. Conceptualized thus, it follows that a characteristic response to politicization is the will to depoliticize issues and established systems of relations, which involves the covering-over and thus the sedimentation of the originating moment of these systems.

In operationalizing these concepts, our empirical analysis draws principally on 21 open-ended interviews and questionnaires with OWE/MSP social actors in different sectors, as well as the analysis of planning documents, policy reports, legal judgements, position papers and media statements, which were produced by officials, politicians, developers and campaigners. Data collection was carried out in three phases. The first phase of this research consisted of a series of e-mail exchanges with national MSP authorities during March–May 2016. Here, the purpose was to garner initial understandings of the dispute, as well as to identify key actors engaged in the MSP process, who were subsequently recruited as participants in the study.

Broadly speaking, we discovered three main categories of objectors that emerged as the planning process unfolded. The first group we identified comprised local resident objectors, who were brought together under the banner of the anti-development coalition, Hiiu Tuul. The second group consisted of local state actors, namely the Emmaste and Käina

municipalities. The third and final set of objectors comprised central state actors, specifically the Ministry of Defence, although only Hiiu Tuul and Emmaste municipality contested the final marine plan in court. What is more, although it is not clear why Käina municipality did not seek recourse to a legal judgement, the Defense Ministry did not need to do so. This is because its (security) interests were deemed to be of national strategic importance. (We shall later discuss the crucial implications of this fact for the stated ambition of MSP to bring about a consensus solution.)

Phase two of the fieldwork (July 2016) involved face-to-face interviews with the following respondents: 13 members of Hiiu Tuul (NGO of Hiiumaa – resident objectors); one representative from the Estonian Wind Power Association (facilitator) and three representatives from the Estonian Ministry of Finance (national MSP supervisory authorities). All interviews were conducted in English and each lasted between 2 and 3 hours. They were audio recorded, fully transcribed and subsequently analysed through an inductive coding process into discourses, interests, priorities and power dynamics at play.

The analysis of such interviews was complemented by further research carried out during phase three, which included open-ended e-mail questionnaires with four county planning authorities between September 2016 and February 2017. As these actors were responsible for planning the Hiiumaa marine space, the aim of this exercise was to cultivate broad understandings and a synoptic overview of the institutional set-up of MSP, as well as the impressions of these authorities about the participatory process at Hiiumaa. The gathering and analysis of these primary data were also supplemented with site visits.

The rollout of MSP: Grievances, emergent demands and antagonisms

In 2009, the EU Renewable Energy Directive set Estonia's renewable energy (RE) target for 2020 at 25% of its energy use, substantially higher than the country's share of 18%, which it recorded in 2005. Yet, having met its 2020 target in 2011, Estonia set out to produce increased quantities of RE, particularly from OWE, for exports to other countries, especially the countries surrounding the North Sea, where costs are relatively higher. However, the development of Estonian wind power has not been smooth, as proposals for wind farm construction off the coast of the island of Hiiumaa have been met with strong opposition. For example, after the launch of a local petition in 2009 containing over 8000 signatures, plans by the Canadian energy company, Greta Energy, to develop six locations along the island's coastline, with further plans for offshore wind farms, were put on hold. Equally, proposals by the largest wind energy company in the Baltic Sea, Nelja Energia or 4Energia, to build an OWE farm off Hiiumaa came to a 'temporary standstill' in the face of local opposition. In 2006, the company applied for a permit of special use of water to the Ministry of Environment with plans to construct between 100 and 200 turbines with an output capacity of between 700 MW and 1100 MW at a depth of 10–30 meters on Hiiumaa's Apollo and Vinkov shoals. Strong opposition and concerns from local residents, two municipalities – Käina and Emmaste – and the Ministry of Defence, led to the suspension of permitting procedures for all OWE proposals, pending the establishment of a legal framework to regulate and plan OWE development, alongside other uses of, and interests at sea.

We focus on the opposition to 4Energia's proposed project at Hiiumaa, which prompted the rollout of Estonia's first MSP. Our analysis examines three periods of negotiations and decisions. The first comprises discussions that took place between 2009 and 2012, immediately before the launch of MSP. The second period, from June 2012 until June 2016, includes the deliberations and decisions that occurred as part of the formal participatory MSP process – the actualization of MSP – from the stakeholder analytic exercises until the

Table 1. Key MSP (including extra-planning) events, decisions and dates.

Key MSP events and decisions	Dates
Official launch of MSP	11 October 2012
Initiation of SEA	23 October 2012
Public hearings on starting positions	19–20 February 2013
Public hearing on draft of SEA	3 May 2013
First public hearing on SEA and draft plan	28 November 2013
Second public hearing on SEA and draft plan	3 March 2014
Third public hearing on SEA and draft plan	10 February 2015
Approval of SEA by environmental board	25 March 2015
Adoption of Plan by Hiiumaa Governor	20 June 2016
Contestation of plan by Hiiu Tuul and Emmaste municipality	July 2016
First court ruling	26 April 2017 and 5 May 2017
Second court ruling	30 October 2017

SEA: Strategic Environmental Assessment; MSP: marine spatial planning.

adoption of a marine plan. The last period – July 2016 until 30 October 2017 – includes an extra-planning (legal) space, which provides the condition of possibility of both the challenge and stabilization of the plan. Table 1 above outlines key dates, events and decisions in the Hiiumaa MSP process. Below, in our ‘thick’ description of the events and processes, we shall make it clear that the pre-MSP interactive phase proved the most satisfactory for residents in terms of the resolutions that were reached. However, social relations at Hiiumaa became strained during the formal MSP processes, and conflict peaked after the adoption of the marine plan, as residents and Emmaste municipality opposed it in court for over 16 months.

Pre-planning

In 2009, the Hiiumaa County Governor and 4Energia organized a series of pre-planning meetings at different Hiiumaa locations. At these meetings, residents expressed a series of fears over the environmental, economic, social, health and place-based impacts of the proposed development. Over time, these fears came to focus on the perceived negative ‘effects of considering big generators’ (Resident 1), with local inhabitants advocating the construction of ‘small’ windmills, which would provide the island with energy security, while counting as Hiiumaa’s contribution to global climate change mitigation. Such concerns are said to have been prompted by arguments that were elaborated by a researcher from Tallinn University of Technology during a 2009 public workshop. In the words of one resident, the researcher ‘demonstrated graphically that wind energy is not as “green” as often discoursed’ (Resident 1). Indeed, during these pre-planning encounters, local residents believed that they had established a verbal agreement with the then Governor that prior to the formal opening of the planning process, a study into the different sources of green energy – biogas, solar energy and ‘small’ windmills – would be undertaken to determine efficient combinations of renewables to meet Hiiumaa’s energy needs.

Against this background, residents initially felt that these pre-planning interactions were useful. In the words of another resident: ‘We were absolutely thrilled with the outcome of the meetings’ (Resident 2). Such meetings paved the way for them to express their concerns in the form of requests that should be considered during the formal MSP processes. But

before we discuss how the formal MSP processes were organized, we need to stress a few things about the pre-planning processes. First, at this stage, no formal plans had been put to the public. Secondly, in the absence of a legal framework establishing guidelines for MSP processes, all pre-planning discussions and negotiations were of an ‘informal’ character and thus, non-binding. Thirdly, given the informal character of pre-planning meetings, participation by residents was on an individual basis rather than through a formally constituted organization.

MSP in practice

The MSP process, which opened in 2012, was led by Hiiumaa County authorities and administered by the Hiiumaa County Governor. They were assisted by a Governor-appointed Steering Group composed of representatives from the following local sectors: the county government, environmental groups, wind energy, rural development organizations, the Association of Local Municipalities, the maritime office, the Police and different ministries. The Hiiumaa MSP was supervised by the Ministry of Finance. However, at the start of MSP, the County Governor of Hiiumaa had changed, potentially dislocating the verbal agreements, which had allegedly been forged in the pre-planning phase. The process was to take four years, and MSP was presented as a means to deliver ‘democratic and functional long-term planning for spatial development’, which ‘in a balanced manner’ would provide ‘long-term directions and needs in the development of the economic, social, cultural and natural environment’ (Riigikogu, 2013: §1, para. 3). During this period, two public meetings, four public displays, five public hearings, as well as five information sharing meetings and seminars, took place at different Hiiumaa locations and were attended by a range of stakeholders.

Information about the public hearings and the display of draft plans was circulated to a mailing list that consisted of persons that the planning authorities (after the so-called ‘issues mapping exercises’) considered would be interested in or affected by planning. Information to the general public was published in local newspapers, as well as on local and county government websites. The planning process addressed a range of topics and issues, including fishing and aquaculture, leisure and tourism-related activities, transport and areas of ‘national interest’ (e.g. energy and mineral reserves, cultural heritage and national security). Inter alia, the plan was drawn up on the basis of relevant national documents, including the Electricity Sector Development Plan until 2018, the National Plan for Estonia 2030+, the Transport Development Plan 2014–2020, the Estonian Environmental Strategy until 2030, the Nature Conservation and Development Plan until 2020 and the National Defence Development Plan for 2013–2022.

Emergent demands

As the MSP process unfolded, residents continued to voice demands for further studies on the impacts of the development. Indeed, they began to articulate a chain of demands, linking together their fears about the destruction of seascapes with concerns for marine protection, economic well-being, inter-generational justice and local security, as well as worries over infrasound-related health and noise pollution. These fears, particularly those focused on the obstruction of scenic views and environmental protection, coalesced around site location, especially 4Energia’s proposed Apollo wind farm, which was to be developed in a major breeding ground for migratory long-tailed ducks, and which was being considered by the Ministry of Environment as a possible marine protection area (MPA) (around PT2 and PT3

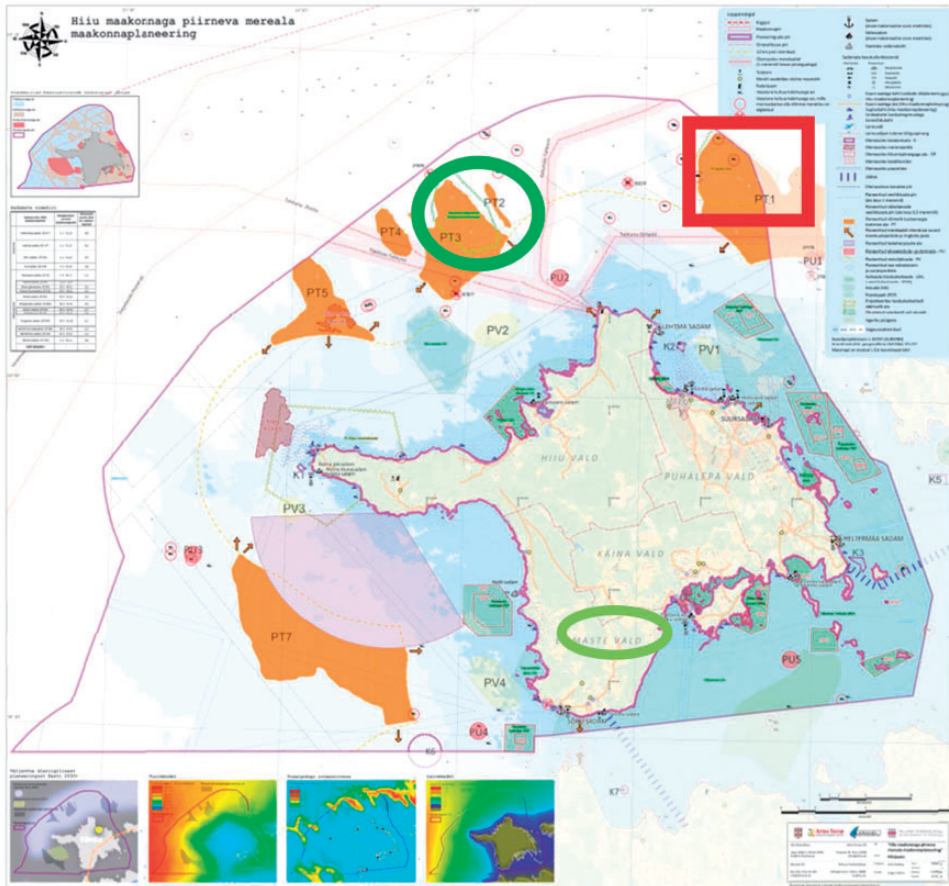


Figure 1. Map of Hiiumaa. Green circle denotes proposed MPA area in conflict with proposed OWE. Red rectangular shape denotes proposed OWE area in conflict with military (national security) interests. Light green oval shape denotes location of Emmaste municipality (the main municipal objectors).

on Figure 1). At the same time, residents drew on local knowledge to foreground the region's geology of karst limestone rock and the legacy of sinkholes in Hiiumaa, notably the Kurisu sinkhole near Pihla village in Kõrgessaare. Digging into the seabed for wind farms, it was argued, ran the risk of destabilizing the water regime and causing more sinkholes. For example, one resident argued that 'the impact of underwater digging for wind farms on the water regime is unpredictable. We require that studies be made to demonstrate that the installation of wind farms will not affect the water regime' (Resident 1).

The emergent demands for environmental protection were linked to concerns over the reduction of economic opportunities for inhabitants, particularly the loss of income through turbine-induced reductions in tourist visits and water sports activities. One resident thus argued that 'tourism can provide jobs for people who do not have sufficient education. It provides jobs for drivers, tourist guides, cleaners, builders, accommodation owners etc. Why do they want to destroy this capital?' (Resident 1). Such economic risks were articulated alongside perceived infringements to inter-generational justice. Here, it was argued

that while the project would be financially beneficial for 4Energia, its ecological footprints would be suffered by future generations. In the words of one inhabitant, ‘living space for present and future generations will be destroyed for the profit of foreigners, not community members. We don’t inherit the world from our parents, we borrow it from our children’ (Resident 12).

In fact, as the MSP process took shape, anti-establishment sentiments of a more populist kind were increasingly enunciated, as residents portrayed themselves as ‘prey’, who because of their small numbers, were targeted to lose the environmental, economic and social benefits that the island offers, for the financial benefit of wind energy companies. For example, it was alleged that the OWE development would oblige Hiiumaa residents to pay higher electricity prices, as they would be required to ‘repay’ government subsidies to 4Energia. As one resident claimed: ‘We are the poor Aborigines, the easy prey who have to pay the price of so-called sustainable energy that profits energy companies’ (Resident 13). In fact, these statements were framed by appeals to local insecurity, as well as historical and geopolitical legacies, namely the Soviet occupation of Estonia, during which Hiiumaa served as a military base for Soviet forces, so that its coastal areas were sealed off to residents. One resident feared that if, after building wind farms, 4Energia is no longer interested in operating the turbines, this situation ‘might attract Russian capital. That is simply unacceptable’ (Resident 9). Or, as another resident put it, ‘we don’t want to be colonized again’ (Resident 10).

Set against this background, and expressed during public events and hearings on draft proposals, residents increasingly requested that independent scientific studies be carried out in relation to their different concerns. They also demanded that where such worries were found to be corroborated by scientific evidence, detailed studies (in the form of an EIA) should be done to account for the ways in which 4Energia would address or mitigate them. Such grievances resonated with objections brought forward by Emmaste Municipality, which reiterated arguments that 4Energia’s project would industrialize Hiiumaa and interfere with its scenic uniqueness. In their eyes, it was incompatible with marine protection concerns around the Apollo shoal. That is, the project was seen to contradict the Natura2000 regulations, while interfering with the logic of municipal comprehensive planning, especially because the project was envisaged to have grid connections on land. However, such studies were simply postponed by county planners. And, importantly, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) was conducted, in lieu of an EIA. Although by definitional fiat, the SEA does not require detailed analyses, it was nonetheless contested at Hiiumaa precisely for its lack of details.

Compromises, hardened boundaries and antagonisms

Local opposition that was crystallized in the MSP process produced concessions from developers. In the first place, it resulted in the cancellation of a proposed wind farm area in Hiiumaa’s Neupokojevi shallows, following strong reservations from site operators in the local tourism industry. Secondly, 4Energia decided to extend the proposed OWE location further seaward, about 12 kilometres from the shorelines. An OWE facilitator thus saw MSP as a useful tool to reach a consensual and satisfying solution to conflicting sea interests. She argued thus:

Planning is a game between stakeholders where everybody has their interests, and the goal is to reach a common ground ... as such it was decided that 12 kilometers from the sea shores was the closest one can build wind turbines ... I think 12 kilometers is a good

compromise because it is still economically possible to build wind turbines, and it won't bother anybody. (Facilitator)

However, these concessions did not respond adequately to the demands of residents. Indeed, relations between residents, the county government and OWE actors deteriorated as residents later felt that instead of initiating the requested studies, the county government was bent on 'planning for big windmills without considering their negative environmental impacts' (Residents 1, 2, 4 and 6). Residents also felt that MSP was organized not so much to listen to and address their grievances meaningfully, but rather as a forum for planners to 'defend the offshore wind energy project' (Resident 8).

For their part, the county government felt that residents were not interested in the 'common good' of the wider public but were pushing for limited objectives. Indeed, for national MSP authorities, participation at Hiiumaa was fraught with tension, because both the county government and residents 'went to the table from a war position' (MSP 1). National MSP authorities characterized residents' concerns and perceptions of 4Energia's project as arising from 'fear' and they felt that both parties were mainly interested in defending their positions and interests. From this perspective, such fears could have been easily dispelled by a truly dialogical process. As one national planner put it:

Maybe I'm not fair. But I feel like they [residents] have this kind of blind fear for offshore wind energy... It's more out of fear than anything else. Fear... of the unknown. One of the problems behind the Hiiumaa MSP is that the locals and the county government started from a war position. I don't know. The county government held the attitude... that the locals were opposing [the project] and they [county government] kind of had the feeling that they had to fight the locals to defend their interest or something. I understand that if you start a process from a war position, it is very difficult to come to a common solution. (MSP 1)

It was in this atmosphere of lingering distrust that the Governor forwarded Hiiumaa's marine plan to national MSP authorities for approval. Failing to reach a compromise between the county government, Emmaste municipality and residents, national MSP authorities approved the plan on the basis that 'it was not found to be in contradiction with the law' (national MSP 2). Put more fully, they concluded that the planning followed procedural steps (participation) laid down in planning regulation, and did not contravene existing environmental regulations, in terms of conflicts with Natura2000 sites. In terms of environmental protection, it was found that the plan had a specific proviso, namely, that no wind farms would be built in the Apollo area, if the proposed MPA was eventually approved. Following this, the county Governor adopted the plan in June 2016. In July of the same year, Hiiumaa residents and Emmaste municipality contested the plan in court for its perceived negative environmental, economic and social impacts. However, in April, May and October 2017, the court ruled against these objections.

And finally, although the Ministry of Defense was strongly concerned that building wind turbines around PT1 (see rectangular shape in Figure 1) would interfere with its radar system, they did not need to oppose the plan in court. Since priority is given to issues of national security in the Estonian context, turbine specifics (such as their location and heights as recommended by Defense Ministry) would have to be negotiated between 4Energia and the Ministry of Defense at a later stage, that is, during the licensing processes of the project. We deconstruct this phenomenon in our concluding discussions, where we attempt an evaluation of MSP in its balance-consensus promise. Nonetheless, at this stage, 4Energia has expressed its readiness to completely discontinue the wind farm project at Hiiumaa if the

Defense Ministry is adamantly opposed to changing their original conditionality. This is because the company considers that building wind farms further offshore and at the recommended height would be economically unfeasible for them. The alternative – not building wind farms at all around PT1 – is also problematic, as it would reduce the project's megawatt capacity far below an acceptable minimum, which is 700 megawatts. In short, the faith of 4Energia's project heavily hangs on their willingness to reach a compromise with an adamantly reluctant Ministry of Defense.

The politics of campaigning and coalition building: Politicization at Hiiumaa

What we have referred to as the *political* dimension of MSP, in which the latter is an ontological category, manifests itself in the construction of antagonisms, while making visible the pervasive presence of power in social relations (see Tafon, 2017). In our empirical analysis, this ontological category can be translated and operationalized in two fundamental ways. First, it functions as a *politicization strategy*, which shows itself in the reactivation of the contingent nature of every institution, and in the linking together of demands in the building of coalitions and assemblages. Secondly, it manifests itself as a *depoliticization strategy* that embodies the dynamics of policy or regime stabilization. In the following two sections, we explore each aspect in turn, starting with the practices of campaigning and coalition building.

Articulating disparate demands around a contingent nodal point

Amongst aggrieved residents in Hiiumaa, the practice of politics revealed itself as the expression and linking together of disparate, yet interlocking interests and demands around a nodal point. The express purpose of such practices was the forging of assemblages that could challenge both the OWE project and the MSP practice. As we have seen, 4Energia's project was challenged because of its perceived negative environmental, economic and social sustainability impacts. Rival sustainability claims by residents directly opposed those asserted and articulated by the proponents of the OWE project. As a first step, opponents amongst the residents, who constituted members of a defunct anti-wind power movement – Hiiumaa Citizens Movement – decided to form a non-governmental organization, which they named Hiiu Tuul MTÜ (henceforth Hiiu Tuul).

So as to gain the required legal status, which would permit the NGO to openly challenge the plan in court, Hiiu Tuul was formed in 2016 following the adoption of the Hiiumaa marine plan. It was recalled by one resident that

We operated as a movement in those days because, as a movement, you are not required by law to submit a financial statement or such, a thing for which we do not really have the time. But in the present circumstances, the planning regulation makes it clear that you cannot make any meaningful claim as a group of citizens, if you are not represented by a legal body. (Resident 1)

While the former Citizens Movement was centrally organized around two main claims – the perceived adverse effects of onshore wind farms on Hiiumaa's property values and its aesthetic uniqueness – the circumstances of the OWE project presented a great challenge. First, the fact that county-wide marine plans, such as the one in Hiiumaa, are legally binding and serve as a point for decision-making, meant that unresolved conflicts around OWE would be difficult to address during the implementation stage. Secondly, the Hiiu Tuul membership

was composed of actors who displayed differentially prioritized interests and demands in motivating their individual political actions. Such disparate interests, all of which are *not* necessarily commonly shared by members, ranged from economic, environmental, local defense (geo-political), seascape aesthetic and human health-related concerns as discussed earlier. The heterogeneous character of these interests had to be dissolved in order to present a common political front.

Framed in these ways, Hiiu Tuul members developed a ‘we-don’t-want-wind-farms’ slogan that effectively functioned as a *nodal point* that contingently harnessed together the different identities and interests. Nodal points are privileged clusters of signification, which fuse together a series of internal differences. They enable the organization of oppositional coalitions and assemblages among members of a forged assemblage, thus allowing actors to engage in political action against a common opposition. In symbolic terms, nodal points take the form of empty signifiers, which can be distinguished from floating signifiers. Empty signifiers are representational forms that partially *fix* the meaning of different identities and demands by rendering them equivalent to one another. This equivalential operation involves a tendential ‘emptying’ of the meaning of each of the particular demands or identities that are linked together in a campaign or movement, and the creation of a more universal identity that embodies a shared goal that is to be strived for. The equivalence is thus brokered through the construction of a common opposition against something that is presented as an external blockage to the identity and its achievement (Laclau, 1995). By contrast, floating signifiers are those elements that are relatively unfixed – they are unmoored from a chain or system that fixes its meaning – and are thus available for (re) articulation.

Empty signifiers are thus able to bind differences together, while conferring a more overdetermined identity. But in so doing, they may also conceal the differences they connect. Although, therefore, the Hiiu Tuul membership and its various political actions were effectively tied together around a particular nodal point/empty signifier, which incarnated a more *universal* demand, the latter still represented a series of dispersed and even contradictory demands. In fact, the degree to which residents subscribed to the ‘we-don’t-want-wind-farms’ signifier varied considerably amongst Hiiu Tuul members. While some residents wanted no wind farms at all, others stipulated disparate conditions under which wind farms could be tolerated. These differing degrees of objection, which are captured in Fast’s (2015) categorization of ‘absolute’ (unconditional) and ‘qualified’ (conditional) opposition respectively, are also reflected in the contingent and incommensurable totality that the empty signifier in our case symbolizes. That is, while different residents constructed differing interests and priorities, the ‘absolute’ position expressed in the nodal point served tendentially as the glue that could hold together the emerging coalition. It thus enabled Hiiu Tuul members to build a common opposition to an object – wind farms – that was discursively constructed as negating these heterogeneous identities and interests.

The logic of ‘othering’ and the creation of political frontiers

Thus far, we have discussed the ways in which Hiiu Tuul tendentially aggregated the differential character of its demands and interests into a relative universality. This aggregation was intimately bound up with the construction of an ‘enemy’ and the drawing up of a deep political frontier between Hiiu Tuul and its named ‘other’. More fully, Hiiu Tuul was able to institute a political frontier that divided the social world into two polarized camps. On the one hand, there was the production of a self-constructed ‘we’ camp, which comprised Hiiu Tuul members and local municipalities (even if there have been no signs of an explicitly

defined discourse coalition between the two entities). On the other side, Hiiu Tuul erected a ‘they’ camp, which comprised the Hiiumaa Environmental Board, the Estonian Fund for Nature, county and national MSP authorities, 4Energia, the Estonian Wind Power Association, as well as agencies that conducted Hiiumaa’s SEA. The drawing of a political frontier between ‘we’ and ‘they’ by Hiiu Tuul consisted in dissolving the differential identities of these agencies and institutions into a single identity – ‘offshore wind energy fanatics’ (Resident 1) – against which it politically positioned itself. Hiiu Tuul represented this threatening identity as the main ‘enemy’ blocking the realization of its heterogeneous ‘enjoyments’ or interests.

The following factors contributed to this political strategy. First, it was made possible by the fact that the Hiiumaa Environmental Board approved the SEA, or what Hiiu Tuul referred to as ‘inconclusive’ studies, as discussed earlier. Second, it was aided by the fact that the Estonian Fund for nature did not challenge the marine plan, even though the designation of PT2 and PT3 areas for OWE development conflicted with the proposed MPA. And, finally, it was facilitated by the fact that national MSP authorities approved the highly contested plan, despite its perceived contradiction with environmental regulations. Such factors were confirmed by one of the residents, when she asserted:

These OWE fanatics are all the same. The fact that the (marine) plan has been approved and adopted despite full knowledge of an ongoing MPA application process means that environmental protection of the seas is not a priority for them. They are all for OWE... How can their so-called ‘green’ energy not flinch in front of the prospect of an MPA? (Resident 1)

Indeed, in reference to what she perceived as the ‘silence’ of the Environmental Board and the Estonian Fund for Nature in the face of an imminent environmental threat, another respondent asked rhetorically: ‘Where are they? Why aren’t they out there with banners to protest like us?’ (Resident 11).

The politics of managing and governing wicked issues: Depoliticization at Hiiumaa

In the context of mounting challenges to the proposed OWE, which was mainly spearheaded by Hiiu Tuul and Emmaste Municipality, 4Energia responded with a number of strategies and tactics of its own. Here, it endeavoured to complexify the boundaries between itself and the local community, while recasting the protesters as the ‘real’ *other* of the community. We thus explore their logics of ‘dis-othering’, where the developers sought to dismantle the emergent chains of equivalence in the name of legitimate differences.

The logic of ‘dis-othering’

In 2014, in an attempt to portray 4Energia’s corporate social responsibility image in a favourable light, the company signed a cooperation agreement with Hiiu municipality, where the authorities were more receptive to the promises of wind energy. The agreement contained several benefits that would accrue to Hiiu municipality and its inhabitants in terms of financial incentives, community development projects, employment and training opportunities related to wind turbine maintenance and a series of other social benefits. The terms of this agreement, which were invoked by several county planners and OWE promoters alike, often as proof of local and municipal support for OWE in Hiiumaa, represented an endeavour by the developers to blur and reframe the political frontier,

which Hiiu Tuul had erected between the local community (Hiiu Tuul and municipalities) and OWE developers and promoters. In this way, 4Energia sought to ‘dis-other’ itself by claiming that it was working with and for forward-looking residents and municipalities, who shared 4Energia’s vision to resolve pressing socio-economic, cultural and developmental problems facing Hiiumaa residents, rather than working against the interests of the community.

Lack of development opportunities and energy insecurity in Hiiumaa, coupled with the dangers of outward migration, constituted some of the problems that 4Energia promised to resolve:

This project will help them increase their energy security. Right now, if they wanted to increase their consumption capacity, they couldn’t because there is not enough capacity available on the island. We want to give them a round [holistic] solution to electrification problems. . . We are offering development opportunities to the whole community. . . and it is their choice to say no. (Facilitator)

The logic of ‘othering’

By seeking to ‘dis-other’ their relations with the Hiiumaa community, the OWE sector simultaneously proceeded to ‘other’ by isolating Hiiu Tuul’s opposition from the rest of the broader Hiiumaa community. In this way, Hiiu Tuul members were constructed as recalcitrant NIMBYs, who would do everything in their power to block development, principally on the grounds of their limited self-interests, which would be detrimental to the interests of the ‘broader’ community. It was argued thus:

These people claim that they represent the whole population of Hiiumaa, but that is not the case anymore . . . because people accept offshore wind farms that are far away than in their backyard. . . We focus on people who see the problems of Hiiumaa. . . and want the project to resolve such problems. I think we have quite good cooperation with them. (Facilitator)

Another tendency was to aggregate the differential identities and demands of Hiiu Tuul members into an overdetermined and threatening other. In particular, the OWE sector refused to acknowledge the subtleties and differing degrees of OWE resistance within Hiiu Tuul, which we have characterized as the ‘absolute’ and ‘qualified’ positions:

I would say that these people, the anti-lobbyists you met there are really radical. They won’t change their minds whatever we do. We always wanted to cooperate with them, but there was a point when we discovered that they are a priori against wind energy. (Facilitator)

Such dual ‘dis-othering’ and ‘othering’ stratagems followed by the OWE sector were also common among Hiiumaa county MSP authorities, who in equal fashion did not distinguish between ‘qualified’ and ‘absolute’ objectors:

The opposing group is absolutely uncompromising, and sees only one possible solution. . . They are not prepared to compromise and are satisfied with the solution in which the wind turbines will not be established. (County MSPs)

Furthermore, although Hiiu Tuul and Emmaste municipality challenged the marine plan as separate entities, the county authorities increasingly constructed their identity in singular terms, while thwarting their opposition as unrepresentative of popular will. Here, they saw their task as that of ‘balancing’ different sea uses and interests on the one hand, and local and national interests, on the other hand. They argued that the marine plan represents the interests and will of the majority of stakeholders – both nationally and locally conceived.

The entire Plan is based on integrating both local interests and National interests. . . The result of balancing [interests] is that the narrower/smaller interest does not prevail. . . Is local interest a privilege of a narrow constituency or is it an interest of the broader public? . . . Therefore, we cannot agree with the suggestion that one resisting group will represent the opinion of all the population. . . Many people are for the development of offshore wind farms. (County MSPs)

Planning regulation and the logic of sea ownership/stewardship

Such were the key strategies and tactics of the promoters of the proposed project and their discursive embodiments. We now consider how in the wake of the dislocatory events at Hiiumaa, carefully selected clauses of Estonia’s Planning Act – what might be termed the *how*, *who* and *what* of marine participative planning and stewardship – were reified in order to govern issues and subjectivities that militated against the development of OWE. For instance, the right of the Emmaste municipality to oppose the plan is clearly given in planning regulations. The regulation stipulates that before a county-wide spatial plan is approved by the responsible ministry, the county governor must secure the approval of the local authorities of the planning area. Secondly, the Act also states that municipalities may oppose a county plan, where it is deemed that such a plan may impede on their possibility of reaching municipality-specific socio-economic goals as laid down in their comprehensive plans. Thirdly, the Act gives municipalities and citizens the right to oppose a plan, if it is deemed that the planning solution is in contradiction with other parliamentary acts (so-called Acts of the Riigikogu), in terms of non-respect of procedural fairness and biodiversity conservation.

However, although Hiiu Tuul and Emmaste opposed parts of the plan, in terms of the incompatibilities between the proposed MPA and the OWE scheme, national MSP authorities justified their approval of the plan based on the proviso that the designation of OWE would be taken off the ‘proposed’ MPA area if, after careful studies, the latter was eventually approved as MPA.

Furthermore, although Hiiu Tuul had requested that detailed studies be conducted with respect to the adverse effects of wind turbines on long-tailed ducks in the proposed MPA area, both county and national MSP authorities argued that the Planning Act did not require detailed socio-environmental studies or EIAs during the preparation of county-wide plans. Indeed, because of this, it was justified only to conduct preliminary studies, namely SEAs. Thus, it was argued that detailed studies were needed only during the next planning phase, particularly, during the licensing processes, and then in the form of an EIA. Thus, county planners effectively ‘closed down’ and postponed the demand for detailed socio-environmental studies from public debate:

According to the Estonian Planning Regulation it is not possible to carry out all studies during county planning. . . and SEA processes. The task of county planning is to determine areas that

are suitable for development. Further studies and county planning activities, if needed, will be carried out during the next phases of planning where an EIA is needed. (County MSPs)

What is more, on 26 April and 5 May 2017, respectively, the Tallinn Administrative Court ruled against Hiiu Tuul and Emmaste municipality, thus drawing on similar jurisdictional and legal arguments that were made by county and national MSP authorities. In Hiiu Tuul's case, the Court simply argued that the marine plan was simply indicative, as it only designated where specific marine uses could be possibly developed. Seen in these terms, the court argued that considerations about whether a given activity may adversely affect inhabitants can only be made after the adoption of the plan, that is, during the licensing of the project. With respect to the Emmaste municipality, the Court argued that since by law local municipalities do not have planning jurisdiction beyond their baseline, the adopted plan, which designates different uses 'offshore', cannot be seen as having any adverse effects on the socio-economic possibilities of Emmaste on land. A further round of appeals by both complainants resulted in the reaching of a similar verdict on 30 October 2017.

In short, we have shown how by tendentially focusing the terrain of argumentation around multiple and potentially conflicting demands, Hiiumaa residents and, to some extent Emmaste municipality, returned a seemingly necessary and unproblematic OWE to the realm of politics. By the same token, we have shown how through various othering and dis-othering strategies, as well as its discursive appeals to larger climate change concerns and place-specific socio-economic sustainability, the OWE sector sort to provide ideological cover for, and stabilize the precarious OWE scheme. What is more, through evoking the logics of evidence-based planning and the 'common good', and narrowly doing MSP within the confines of programmatic and juridical mechanisms, MSP authorities and the Tallinn Administrative Court sort to displace conflict both spatially and temporally.

Hiiumaa revisited

Returning to the case, then, our reading of this application of MSP is that of a complex set of practices designed to depoliticise the conflicts surrounding the constructing of offshore wind farms. In fact, this hardening of boundaries between the competing projects, which was brought into being through the MSP processes, draws attention to the inescapable politics of any form of infrastructural development. It foregrounds the complex struggles to politicise and depoliticise the spaces of planning that surround the development of wind farms at Hiiumaa. Proponents of the wind farm scheme repeatedly employed logics of difference to incorporate the demands of local residents into schemes, while seeking to break up emerging alliances between residents and local authorities. Indeed, part of the political struggle throughout the planning process was to define the ownership of the common good. Supporters of wind farm development thus repeatedly dismissed protesters as NIMBYS, at times lumping together all protesters under the single banner of self-interested individuals, and claiming that they were not representative of the public good.

But, at the same time, the protest group too engaged in the hegemonic politics of coalition-building, drawing equivalences between demands and interests so as to link together and manage intra-group differences, as well as differences between them, other residents and municipal authorities. They thus drew frontiers between the 'people' of Hiiumaa and the Estonian establishment by enunciating arguments that threw doubt on why the 'people' of Hiiumaa should carry the costs of climate change for others. Equally, they dismissed wind farm development as little more than an instance of capitalist business development and questioned its contribution in tackling the problem of climate change, while calling for

multiple forms of renewable energy. Here, they tapped into locally embedded historical fears, even raising the horrific threat of Russian interference to mobilise local residents against the plans.

Fantasmatic appeals of the latter sort solidified and deepened the boundaries between the opponents and promoters of development, while masking over differences between those opposed to wind farm development off the coast of Hiiumaa. Yet, events at Hiiumaa also revealed weaknesses in the campaign strategies of the protesters, which must be remedied if they are to build a powerful counter-hegemonic front in future interactions. In our analysis, they were unable to articulate an effective empty signifier to further their campaign objectives. Hiiu Tuul's 'we don't want wind farms' mobilizing narrative failed to posit an alternative solution or proposal in the planning process. Its strength was to mask over intra-group differences, but its weakness lay in its determining of a common enemy and its failure to pose an alternative narrative. Indeed, the initial demands for small windmills and multiple sources of renewable energy were hardly encompassed in this mobilising narrative. Yet, weaknesses and limitations were not limited to the opposition camp, but permeated all sides. Indeed, MSP at Hiiumaa is not immune from critique, and it is to this evaluation that we turn in our conclusion.

Evaluating MSP as a process for resolving conflict

The issue of wind farms was effectively politicized at Hiiumaa, because opponents challenged the green credentials of the OWE plan by advancing the demand for smaller windmill development and multiple sources of renewable energy. Undoubtedly, MSP created a space for the building of civic capacity and political subjectivity, as residents came together and built on pre-planning demands to forge a rival project in response to the dislocatory effects of the OWE project and the MSP process. At key moments in the planning processes, some demands were incorporated into the scheme. For example, the wind farm development at the Neupokojevi shallows was removed and 4Energia extended its planned wind farm sites to 12 kilometres from the shore. But, most importantly, 4Energia entered into an agreement with Hiiu municipality, which was part of a strategy to divide protesters and to redefine the public or common good.

Yet, one cannot overlook the limits of MSP as a deliberative process, nor the shortcomings in its promises to engineer greater community integration, promote informed dialogue and broker a 'rational' consensus. Indeed, rather than being a case of 'planners to the rescue', as some commentators have termed it (e.g. Jay, 2010), where 'reasoned' dialogue should lead to more synergies, planners at Hiiumaa failed to create the conditions for the transformation of stakeholder views and attitudes necessary for the construction of a temporary settlement. As the MSP process unfolded, it became increasingly characteristic of the practices of a 'therapeutic consultation'. Space for participatory action was thus confined to the allegedly beneficial acts of expressing demands, but with very little communicative or argumentative dialogue. In the pre-planning process, residents recognised that they were 'thrilled' to be able to voice demands and grievances. But these demands, although they continued to be voiced, remained unanswered, thereby foregrounding the deliberative limits of the planning process as it was actualized in Hiiumaa. Moreover, residents were increasingly frustrated by the failure to answer their demands for further studies and alternative forms of expertise. Such calls for rival expertise came to demonstrate how expertise itself can rarely be relied upon to generate a 'consensus' solution. In this case, rival expert interpretations of wind power were used by residents to question the planning process,

thus challenging the 'green' credentials of wind power and its impact on local marine environments.

Indeed, in one instance of conflict between two powerful sectoral interests – the Ministry of Defense and OWE developers – the proponents of MSP shielded themselves from potential blame by displacing conflict outside the realm of the formal MSP into a bilateral, non-MSP negotiation process between the parties. At the same time, MSP is in many ways framed by a legal discourse that wraps up, legitimizes and limits decision-making within complex regulatory rules and judgements (see for example the replacement of the EIA with the light-weight SEA). Decision-making was placed at an arm's length from the political process, for what mattered was not the weight of opposition, but whether the adopted plan met the legal requirements of MSP (or not). This logic of displacement framed the claims and voices of the protesters in legal terms, so that their demands had to fit within the narrow confines of the legal process. It is thus striking that opponents of the development had to form a legally constituted organisation to be able to make appeals and challenges to the planning process.

What is more, the stages connecting the design of the project were also finessed so as to disarm claims, thus empowering administrative courts to draw universal settlements. In fact, local residents and municipalities were subsequently immersed in a set of legal procedures, whose 'reality' was experienced by residents as an 'arena without rules', in which the discourse of legal expertise was then employed to justify the subtle sequencing of decision-making. Here the overarching legitimacy of the demands that were articulated rests on the narrow interpretation of the legality of the proposals. In part, therefore, the Tallinn Administrative Court negated opposition to the proposed wind farms by ruling that the demands to protect scenic landscapes or the local tourist industry were beyond the consideration of any 'offshore' planning process. By overriding Emmaste municipality's objection in terms of the perceived effects of OWE on (land-based) municipal planning objectives, MSP also failed to consider the intricate interrelationship between land and sea processes.

Moreover, in those circumstances in which immanent conflict was not spatially displaced, the MSP process produced conditions for the deepening of boundaries between opposing forces over time, even though the pre-planning process seemed to create the temporary conditions for dialogue. Indeed, both proponents and opponents were blamed for not entering the planning processes with the 'correct' attitudes, criticized for approaching the planning process as if to go to 'war'. Lastly, MSP may count for little if the Ministry of Defence has its final veto over development, even though it was not included in the MSP discussions.

Conclusion: Towards agonism and pragmatic adversarialism

This article has explained and evaluated the relational and contingent politics of coalition-building in local campaigns against the construction of an offshore wind farm project in Hiiumaa in Estonia. In examining the multiple power mechanisms at play, set alongside the rival discourses of sustainability articulated by differentially positioned stakeholders, we foreground the limits and tensions of the European Union's process of MSP, which many regard as a governance device capable of 'balancing' emergent conflicts and competing values to reach a reasonable and practical consensus. Our analysis shows that far from functioning as a neutral instrument or a transparent space of reasoned communication, the practices of MSP at Hiiumaa showed many signs of the 'post-political' planning syndrome, which are evident in other contexts (see Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012; Flannery et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2016; Smith and Jentoft, 2017).

In other words, through the temporal and spatial displacement of conflict (including the recourse to various discourses of legality and expertise), MSP effectively served as a forum or space, which exuded a certain strategic selectivity for different ‘establishments’ and assemblages to wield power and pursue their interests, thus depoliticizing and legitimizing control over marine space and actors. Of course, such displacements and exclusions are only temporary, so that the prospects for conflict to erupt could be magnified as the OWE project and MSP ‘stagger’ onto the licensing and implementation stages. Indeed, following the appeals of local campaigners from July 2016 to October 2017, this displacement of issues through legal judgements will undoubtedly lead to further delay and financial costs for both planners and developers beyond that which has already been incurred.

Even so, the lurking presence of conflict should not be a cause for despair. Instead, it should serve as a reminder to all those who advocate planning or policy systems that seek a purely technocratic and/or rationalistic solution that such ostensibly ‘post-political’ approaches and methods are not immunized from politics. So, interestingly, the fact that MSP is an ongoing political process means that there are still opportunities to ‘turn things around’, thus leaving open the possibility that actors can acknowledge and address both those conflicts that were ‘postponed’ as well as the new challenges that will inevitably appear over time. Importantly, however, if we are to take seriously the MSP ambition of reaching sustainability objectives at sea, the implication is that all actors involved in the dispute must infuse their practices with an alternative ethos of engagement.

As a way of rescuing MSP from the charge that it is an unevenly structured terrain within which the ‘powerful’ can more easily operate to achieve their outcomes, we thus conclude that planners should develop governance norms in line with what we term a practice of ‘pragmatic adversarialism’. This concept points to a kind of practice that can tackle one of the puzzles encountered in endeavours to imagine and implement environmentally sustainable forms of energy production and consumption, especially in contexts marked by sharp disagreements about seemingly shared ends. The adversarial dimension of our proposal highlights the deeply entrenched role of politics in negotiating differences, as rival projects endeavour to impose their wills, while the pragmatic element speaks to the cultivation of an appropriate ethos that should animate those involved in struggle.

Adversaries are thus not enemies intent on each other’s mutual destruction, but nor are they just competitors who bargain about outcomes with a fixed set of preferences. Instead, adversaries are encouraged vigorously to espouse their values and ideals, while acknowledging the right of rival forces to articulate and promote their views with equal passion. Indeed, because the expression of divergent ideals can enhance the development and canvassing of a wide spectrum of possible practices, organizational forms and policy outcomes, sharp contestations about outcomes are both inevitable and desirable. In short, in the interests of achieving durable settlements that are legitimate and acceptable to affected citizens, pragmatic adversarialism offers a desirable mode of reaching workable agreements in public controversies.

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