

Forskningsartikel

Common sense and climate mitigation

Articulations of objection to wind power establishment

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This article examines the discourse surrounding wind-power establishment in Sweden, analyzing how common sense is mobilized in opposition to planned projects. The analysis draws on media coverage of opinion pieces. Identifying three prominent forms of articulation, the study highlights how these narratives frame wind turbines as symbols of conflict – between local environmental concerns, regional identity and democratic influence, and financial stability. Drawing on a critical folkloristic perspective, the article explores the complex interaction between local sentiments and broader political discourses, illustrating how local transition conflicts function as arenas for ideological struggle and the articulation of competing values. Criticism of market-driven mechanisms may enhance civic involvement; however, there is a parallel risk that such mobilization will be subsumed into larger political discourses designed to obstruct climate transformation. Under these conditions, the climate crisis and democratic accountability may increasingly be recast as elements of an expanding “culture war” narrative.

Keywords: common sense, critical folkloristics, climate change, wind power, local opposition, Sweden

Den här artikeln analyserar hur motstånd mot vindkraftsetablering uttrycks i opinionstexter publicerade i lokala nyhetstidningar i Sverige. Texterna utgör en komplex väv som, trots sina olikheter, förenas genom hänvisningar till sunt förnuft. Tre övergripande artikulationer identifieras. Dessa berör lokala naturvärden, rättvisa och demokratiskt inflytande, samt ekonomiska konsekvenser. Det empiriska materialet analyseras i relation till den svenska historiska kontexten, där politiska beslut möjliggjorde ett skifte i riktning mot en marknadsorienterad och decentraliserad modell för vindkraftsutbyggnad. Med utgångspunkt i Gramscis teoretiska ramverk föreslås att motståndet visar på fördjupade sprickor i ett tidigare etablerat samtycke. Samtidigt som kritik av marknadsdrivna styrmedel kan bidra till att stärka samhälleligt deltagande finns även en risk att protester ytterligare approprieras i bredare politiska diskurser med syfte att fördröja klimatomställningen. Om det sker kan klimatkrisen och frågan om demokratisk inflytande i allt högre grad komma att framställas som en del av ett bredare ”kulturkrig”.

Nyckelord: sunt förnuft, kritisk folkloristik, klimatförändringar, vindkraft, lokalt motstånd, Sverige

People have to have a language to speak about where they are and what other possible futures are available to them (Hall 2016: 205).

Introduction

The issue of establishing wind turbines has come to symbolize the broader transition toward renewable energy systems. In current scholarship, there are at least three ways of understanding the opposition to wind power: firstly, as expressions of climate obstruction fuelled by the fossil industry (Slevin et al. 2025). Secondly, as ideological far-right resistance

(Weisskircher & Volk 2025; Dechézelles & Scotti 2022), and thirdly, as regional and indigenous land-based opposition (Batel, Valqueresma & Alba 2024; Fjellheim 2023). In this article, I explore how resistance to wind power is narrated through an invocation of common sense in local opinion pieces across Sweden. The aim is to capture the forms through which public discontent is expressed, and how these articulations respond to broader societal discourses and material realities. I believe storytelling to be an overlooked dimension in scholarly work on transition conflicts. At the same time, the ways in which we try to grasp both climate change as a crisis, and the attempts to mitigate that change, are

largely dependent on how it is made intelligible through narration. Previous folkloristic and ethnological research relevant to this study has explored narratives about extreme weather events (Kverndokk 2018), the multiple temporalities conveyed in climate change discourses (Kverndokk, Ruge Bjærke & Eriksen 2021), rural experiences of sustainability policy (Wollin Elhouar 2014), and sustainability in human-nature relations in rural peripheries (Hämeenaho & Wollin 2020), to name a few.

References to the Swedish expression *sunt förnuft* are translated here into the English term “common sense”. As I have suggested elsewhere, the Swedish equivalent more directly connotes “soundness” or “healthiness”, rather than collective judgment (Reinhammar 2025). The etymological history of the word *förnuft* however, suggests a meaning best translated as sensing or discerning a reasonable position. The phrasing is used here in a manner similar to “common sense” in the English-speaking world (Rosenfeld 2011); in the opinion pieces, it serves as a reference to a self-evident understanding of what is right and wrong. The texts are therefore regarded as politically charged, shaping and influencing climate discourse. In line with this understanding, I draw on critical folkloristics, which examines the narrative practices through which knowledge, conceptions, and beliefs are formed, and analyzes them in relation to political discourse and ideology (Gencarella 2009, 2010, 2011).

Climate change has been described as a de-politicized crisis (Mouffe 2018). While there exist different positionings regarding for example energy transition, conflicts of interest on a deeper systemic level are largely absent in the political discourse on a macro level. Thus, the question of climate change has transformed into the crisis of energy transition without demand on systemic changes. The consequence often allows categorization of critique in an either/or reality on energy alternatives in the race towards industrialization 2.0.¹

Central to the critique of wind power in the empirical material are expressions asserting that economic interests have replaced concern for the local environment, nature, and residents. I suggest that these articulations function as a critique of ecomodernity, where common sense has come to function as the language for expressing discontent. I show how local transitioning conflicts regarding wind power shed light on diverging interests on a level beyond the discussion on energy transition itself. The texts question ecomodernity through a variety of articulations, weaving together sometimes contradictory elements from contemporary left- and right-wing discourses, thereby making the transition conflict a site where broader ideological struggles become visible.²

¹Degrowth and the ongoing discussion on the Green New Deal have been introduced into academic conversations on climate mitigation that require systemic changes.

²Here, I draw on the Gramscian understanding of ideology as summarized by Stuart Hall, who states that ideology consists of “mental frameworks

Wind power: An historical overview of the Swedish context

After the state election in 2022, Sweden has transformed from a relatively progressive state in climate change policy, instead standing “in the forefront of late obstruction” (Malm et al. 2025).³ The election resulted in a right-wing minority Government supported by the Sweden Democrats (SD), where SD became the biggest political party on the right. The new administration quickly reframed the goals from “100% renewable” to “100% fossil-free”, thereby signalling a renewed commitment to nuclear power (Government Offices of Sweden 2023). The changes in climate politics are so rapid and extensive that the Swedish scenario has stirred discussion on a possible “greenlash” in European countries, meaning a regression in climate mitigation advocated by right-wing political parties. The period 2022–2025 is therefore analytically important, as national energy politics then underwent a dramatic rupture, breaking with the long-standing consensus that had prioritized renewable expansion over nuclear power.

To understand this shift, a historical context on the attempt towards an expansion of renewables in the Swedish energy system is needed. From the mid-1990s onward, market liberalization and policy agreements established a market-oriented, decentralized model for wind development (Nilsson et al. 2004). By the 2010s, a broad parliamentary consensus supported renewable expansion. Haikola and Anshelm (2025) conclude that the consensus rested on neoliberal policy tools ultimately accepted also by parties on the left, who hoped it would accelerate the transition. Yet this acceptance followed earlier criticism; representatives of the Social Democrats (S), the Left Party (LP), and the Greens (G) had all argued that shifting responsibility for the energy transition to the market was irresponsible, strongly opposing the 2009 *Energy Agreement*.

First formulated by SD, the rhetorics on defending citizens against wind power spread across the right-wing bloc ahead of the 2022 election, during which market-driven wind development was criticized (Haikola & Anshelm 2025). In this moment, the question of wind power became not only a technical issue but a symbolically charged political concern: a site where appeals to common sense, local identity, and climate mitigation could be mobilized and contested. On the digital platform X, the party leader for the Christian Democrats urged the voters to reject “the steel forests of windmills forced upon Swedes and destroying our

– the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works” (1986: 29).

³This image of Sweden as a progressive state has faced criticism. Vowles, Ekberg & Hultman (2024) conclude that Swedish climate policy did not live up to the Paris Agreement. Thus, “these climate policies can in part be seen as secondary obstruction” (p.127).

nature” (Busch 2021), thereby painting a dystopian image of a future under a left-liberal government. Halfway through the mandate period, a commentator for the far-right online channel Riks stated that “This (Government’s) politics is about restoring common sense to migration, crime, and energy politics” (Sveriges Radio 2024). The media channel, originally launched by the Sweden Democrats in 2020, has close ties to the political party. Currently, common sense is invoked in climate discourse when criticizing attempts to reduce carbon emissions through the expansion of renewable energy.

Methodological and theoretical choices

Common sense gives rejection both a language and a form. This article therefore engages with texts both clearly referring to common sense, and narrations that contain common sensical assertions. The material consists of 132 articles collected from the media database Retriever, published between March 2022 and March 2025. The primary focus of this article is opinion pieces in local newspapers. This is because they often revolve around a specific, local energy conflict regarding the establishment of wind turbines. In Sweden, local newspapers focus on news related to events or concerns within a specific region. This can be contrasted with the national newspapers, which cover the country as a whole. I suggest that opinion pieces in local newspapers are an empirical category that captures how the concrete question of energy transition is translated into everyday experiences and localized conflicts. Opinion pieces as a genre are often personal in tone, expressing individual and sometimes anecdotal experiences. As such, this genre allows for articulations in ways that are not always possible in other genres within traditional media. The authors are typically individual citizens or local networks. This makes them valuable for analyzing how common sense is mobilized in vernacular expression. Through the genre of opinion pieces, I also aim to capture additional voices in the discussion of transitioning conflicts, with the ambition to provide perspectives on how a global crisis in requiring energy transition can be narrated in a local context. By examining how writers weave together personal experience, collective identity, and political critique, I situate opinion pieces as sites where ideological formations take shape and become publicly relatable— an understanding that aligns with a critical folkloristic approach.

The need to formulate stories is an almost fundamental human quality, regardless of whether our language can capture what we are experiencing. Following Jameson (1983), the wind turbine discussions can be considered socially symbolic acts: they performatively shed light on a conflict through references to common sense, which in turn reveal the multifaceted ideological and cultural contradictions in our society, and the ways in which these are entwined. Describing a perception as

“sound” lends legitimacy and validity to an everyday rationality. In this way, common sense also becomes central to symbolically resolving the conflict that the wind power issue has become. In a time of upheaval, we are compelled to articulate how societal change brought about by the climate crisis is experienced. But how do we find the language to express what we are experiencing?

Theoretically, I draw on a Gramscian understanding of common sense as a composite of ideas, beliefs, and notions shaped through folklore, historical sedimentations, and contemporary political and material conditions (Crehan 2016). It is important to underline that there is not one common sense, but many. These various understandings, in turn, strive for recognition. In ethnological terms, the emic understanding of common sense here becomes accessible through its etic, theoretical framing in Gramscian thought. Such attempts to combine the Gramscian understanding with analysis of explicit references to common sense have been carried out before (Hall & O’Shea 2013; Lems 2022). When references to common sense appear in the empirical material, implicitly or explicitly, I interpret these articulations as attempts to challenge the positive account of wind power: its consequences, its value, and therefore its legitimacy. By employing a Gramscian understanding of common sense, such an analysis can highlight which ideas are deemed self-evident and what interests they might serve in a broader societal context. A claim does not, however, become common sense simply because it is labelled as such. Rather, such articulations attempt to naturalize particular understandings of wind power.

When trying to capture how these attempts are carried out, an analysis that emphasizes the importance articulation becomes helpful. An exploration of articulations has previously been lifted as a suiting method for grasping discursive content (Lönnroth & Nilsson, 2024; Gerber, Gunnarsson Payne & Lundgren 2012). A close reading of digital material enables a detailed exploration of articulations. I here follow Stuart Hall, as he suggests that:

Theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects (Grossberg 1996: 142–143).

A significant proportion of the posts discussing the establishment of renewable energy sources concern the presumably negative consequences that it would have for the local area in the present and future. Objections to the establishment of wind power often revolve around the feared impact on local nature, private finances, tourism, wildlife, health, and the “death” of the countryside due to depopulation. While individual texts vary in tone and emphasis, three overarching themes in articulations

are prevalent. First, an articulation with environment expresses concerns for the local natural areas. Second, an articulation concerning responsibility for climate mitigation and the experienced inequality in how that responsibility is distributed. Lastly, an articulation with economy, addresses both individual financial loss and energy pricing, often through explicit references to social class. In the following sections, I examine each of these three articulations in more detail.

Articulation of environmental value

A significant part of the criticism of wind power establishment concerns the protection of (local) natural values. The projects are repeatedly referred to as a short-sighted solution to the increasing energy demand, contrasted to their estimated long-term environmental consequences. The life expectancy of a wind turbine is put in contrast to both other energy sources and compared to the longevity of the landscape. This temporal aspect can be illustrated by the following excerpt, collected from an opinion piece in a local newspaper:

There are other ways to go. Energy efficiency, the expansion of solar energy on already existing buildings, and investments in new technology, such as storage and small-scale energy solutions, are better alternatives. These solutions do not affect the landscape and create long-term sustainable results for both residents and businesses. Saying no to wind power is not “madness”. That is common sense. It is an investment in a future where Eda can grow without sacrificing its unique environment and quality of life (Arvika Nyheter 2024).

The possible future for the local area is here intimately tied to the landscape in a highly material sense; it is not primarily a question of an aestheticized notion of nature, but what that nature means for the local area in terms of livelihoods. There is an expressed belief in the possibility of continuing and growing regional life while keeping the landscape unaffected. It is assumed that the establishment of wind turbines will have negative effects on the local area and nature, as a consequence of the changes imposed on the landscape. Agreeing to such a change would mean “sacrificing” both the environment and the qualities that the area provides its inhabitants. These posts, and many others articulated in similar ways, also raise another central dimension tied to the temporal aspect: that of continued development for local areas. For the places to have a future, there is a need to carefully consider alternatives for an energy transition that would not entail the feared negative effects. Thus, the transition conflict revolves not only around the question of how the landscape would be transformed in a visual sense, but also around how such a transformation would affect the entire social infrastructure of the local community. In most of the

opinion pieces, local nature is presented as an integral part of that infrastructure. This reason for opposing wind power has also been concluded elsewhere (Lindvall 2023).

This framing displaces attention from structural questions of national energy strategy and state responsibility, and instead aligns with a decentralized understanding of energy development. It becomes, as this text illustrates, common sense to reject wind turbine projects since anything else risks killing the hand that feeds you. Refuting wind power is described as “an investment in a future where Eda can grow”. This articulation is persuasive, as it brings together both the protection of the natural environment and the stability for the local community, while simultaneously rejecting the establishment of wind turbines.

Shortly after the Swedish election, the newly assigned Prime Minister, the Conservative leader Ulf Kristersson, stated that no one in Sweden would have to change their lives because of climate change (DN 2022). The statement is in line with the previously advocated ecomodern vision, effectively depoliticizing climate change. The ecomodern ideal emphasizes that societal change can be financially beneficial while serving the ambition to cut carbon emissions (Vowles, Ekberg & Hultman 2024). Thus, there are no perceived conflict between economic growth and environmental consideration. Vallström and Vallström (2014) illustrate how this ideal, formed through a market liberal and ecomodern ideology, came to influence projects for sustainability in Swedish areas referred to as part of “the periphery” through ethnographic work in municipalities in Gävleborg. In line with the idea of a sustainable society as communicated in the rural development program is the understanding of the periphery in which its natural and cultural heritage is regarded as essential for the region’s survival. Sustainable development and the survival of regions constructed as peripheral are framed as the responsibility of the areas themselves. Their future becomes tied to how well they manage, refine, and capitalize on their natural and cultural resources. Conversely, failure to do so is portrayed as risking declining infrastructure and depopulation. Seen through this lens, a neoliberal common sense emerges, where value is assigned through economic growth, and responsibility is shifted from collective structures to local actors. The post above illustrates how this understanding, situated in an overarching societal discourse, manifests in the reaction to wind turbine establishment. If the survival of the countryside is made dependent on its ability to protect and develop its own natural and cultural assets, and such establishment is perceived as a threat to these assets, then a rejection becomes common sense. The conflict lays bare a paradox, where the ideological foundations that promote ecomodern transitions simultaneously create the conditions for rejecting these projects when they are translated into practical, localized realities.

Sacrifice is a recurring term describing what it is that wind turbine establishment would demand of the local population. One opinion piece concludes how "... it's easy to say that people have to 'sacrifice' themselves for 'the climate and electricity shortage' when you sit in an apartment in the city. Then there are actually us people who live and own nice farms and land that we hold dear, we are the ones who will have to live with this for a good 30 years" (Falu-Kuriren 2025). The quotation highlights how it is easy to ask others to accept a change that you do not have to experience yourself, and to do so without encountering any conflicting interests that might challenge such a position. But it also reflects an experienced disregard or lack of interest in acknowledging that there is a local reality at all, let alone its specificity, its culture, and the whole lives that are now feared to be altered by corporate and state initiatives outside the community's control. This post and others similar reflect an experience where life, history, and everyday reality are not taken into account in the planned projects for the areas in question.

The writer concludes further down how "Wind power has come to revolve around so much more than just (the issue of) the environment. They want to establish big wind power industries regardless of consequences for humans, animals, and nature, basically anywhere" (Falu-Kuriren 2025). It is implied that the energy transition is driven by other interests than a concern for climate change alone, and that the responsibility for energy transition asked of the rural areas is set to serve those interests. That the text describes a disregard for the consequences, also for nature, suggests a perceived dissonance in what the energy transition is stated to prevent: negative consequences for the natural systems by mitigating global warming, and the expected negative effect on the local environment because of industrial establishment. This leads us to the second central articulation identified in the transition conflict, which concerns responsibility and conflicting interests.

Articulation of responsibility

Municipalities in Sweden hold the right of veto concerning possible wind projects in the area. The question regarding establishment is therefore a central concern for regional politics. Little more than half of the suggested wind power establishments between the years of 2020-2023 were blocked because of local objection using veto (Westander, Henryson & Kaufmann, 2024). Consequently, discussions concerning a uniform system for financial compensation in connection with wind power establishment have been ongoing. The government inquiry *The value of the wind* presented, for example, various proposals concerning such a system (SOU 2023:18). The Government announced in September 2024 its ambition to financially compensate municipalities for current and upcoming wind turbine establishment. Financial compensation and the right of veto is also central to the second articulation identified.

Predominant is an experienced neglect of criticism raised by local inhabitants, instead favouring corporate interests and financial compensation for establishment. This also makes the discussion on the establishment a site of struggle concerning political influence and democracy. In this way, the local transition conflicts are entangled with broader societal concerns related to trust in processes for decision-making.

The following post illustrates such a concern for democracy being in decline. A previous proposal for wind turbines that was granted in the area laid the foundation for a new, larger project consisting of wind turbines twice the size.

The fact that they now want to build fifteen 270 m high turbines is a manifestation of the kind of raw capitalism that wants to bend rules and laws and abuse municipal plans. The sort of profit where someone else is responsible for the actual cost is, as usual, the most attractive profit – in this case those that pays the price are, among others, the environment, the residents, Killeberg, the northern part of Osby urban area, and ultimately the entire municipality of Osby (Kristianstadsbladet 2023).

The writer concludes that such a concern for profit is not in solidarity with the area and does not belong in a Sweden that "still has some Social Democratic common sense". The narration points to financial interests and capitalism as the major threats to the region, and account for a disappointment in the Social Democratic political development on the state-level. This explicit critique of how Social Democratic politics has evolved at the state level could be seen as a reaction to the parliamentary consensus on a market-driven policy that emerged in 2010. Among suggested alternatives to wind power, the option to reduce energy consumption is also mentioned. The claim that the project represents a system that "bends rules and laws and abuses municipal plans" aligns with a critique of the current market-driven policy, suggesting that companies take advantage of deregulated plans agreed upon on municipality level. Expressing that such an understanding does not belong in a Sweden that "still has some Social Democratic common sense", the narration draws on a historical narrative of Sweden as a welfare state, where economic development should benefit the community and be democratically rooted. This way, it illustrates how the critique of wind power does not easily fall into the left-right spectrum. This use of "common sense" differs from the previous articulation in its critique of structural causes behind the conflict. It attempts towards a counter-hegemonic form of common sense, questioning the market interests' triumph over civil society and local environment, as well as the unquestioned increase in energy demand.

Another opinion piece describes financial compensation from the wind power companies to the

municipalities as “a warning signal”, stating that the tendency of municipalities to reject projects by using their right of veto is evidence of a well-functioning democracy (Östersunds-Posten 2025).

While a critique of endless growth and an emphasis on a stable and responsive democracy can open possibilities for more progressive change, particularly by rebuilding trust during a time of rising polarization, the very same claims can also be absorbed into broader political narratives that strategically delay climate action. Far-right and conservative parties, in particular, have been found to contest renewable energy initiation (Hess & Renner 2019). Niskanen, Anshelm and Haikola (2024) suggest that local veto combined with market governance gives an impression of influence, while in practice leaving municipalities dependent on the “goodwill” of the wind power companies. Furthermore, there is an evident tension between the national statistics, showing strong support for wind power, and the local opposition to specific projects, raising important questions about democratic influence and whose voices are ultimately heard.

Central in the explanatory model for transition conflicts has long been that of the NIMBY phenomenon (“Not In My Backyard”). The term refers to the phenomenon of expressed support for an idea at the societal level, only to reject it once the practical, local consequences of that idea are experienced. Noyes (2018) understands phrases or symbols used to explain public resistance as sometimes being shaped through “bogeys”. In this way, critical reactions can be dismissed as ignorance, placing blame on a smaller group on the individual level. Rather than addressing possible systemic reasons for abjection, the neoliberal framing of common language and discourse results in criticism being directed at the protest itself. Thus, “blame travels” (Noyes 2018: 430). Narrations surrounding transition conflict disclose several layers, transcending beyond the local issue at hand. These narrations suggest that such conflicts encompass ideological struggles and sometimes conflicting positions.

The question of financial compensation also raises the issue of value, where the idea of economic recompense results in antipathy. What is deemed sustainable, and for whom, is a recurring theme. We can understand these articulated protests as a way of delineating and making sense of the changes occurring in the local area, and how these changes are connected to broader societal transformations. The following quotation is taken from an opinion piece expressing disappointment with local politicians for suggesting a planned project. Central is the question of value, where the wind turbine project is contrasted to that of nature and the non-human animals that inhabit it:

Here, money is attracted to various projects, including road maintenance that can be carried out with the sum generated by the wind turbines.

The question is whether their promises really correspond to the destruction of nature and wildlife that will be the result of this project, 37 large wind turbines in the middle of our pristine wilderness, and the amazing silence (Siljan News 2024).

The question is posed rhetorically, asking whether there is any price to be put on the loss of nature and non-human species. The local poll was later withdrawn, as the elected politicians decided to postpone any attempted wind project until after an energy investigation. The conflict of interest concerns natural values, contrasted to those of financial gains. Implicitly, the writer states that it is impossible to financially compensate for the loss of the local environment. From this perspective, the objection is also a critique of a logic where nature and the more-than-human lives are commodified. It expresses a critique of a market-oriented understanding, again reminding of the multifaceted reasons why wind power is opposed. However, there are no conflicting interests expressed in relation to the estimated consequences that climate change will have on the local environment, such as droughts, flooding or biodiversity loss. Significantly, the question of energy transition seems to have lost climate change on the way. Instead, it revolves around the either/or scenario of choice. This leads us to the third articulation identified, which concerns regional and private economy and social class.

Articulation of the economy

The last articulation concerns local infrastructure, and economy in terms private finance and explicit references to class. The following excerpt raises a criticism of what is deemed reasonable, stating an experienced reluctance to consider the perspectives of residents and businesses.

When 100s of people in Finnmarken’s leisure villages, active companies in ecotourism, and nature-interested Orsa residents, protest against these planned industrial areas, they are met with the answer: “We follow the laws, and the County Administrative Board only gives us permission if we do it the right way [...]” Is it wise to destroy nature to save it? Feel free to reflect on that question for a moment. Should Orsa’s most important asset be sacrificed just because a company wants to make money? (Mora Tidning 2024).

Nature is here narrated as an “asset”, disclosing how the expected changes in the local landscape and environment are perceived as a risk to local businesses. It shares with the first articulation identified a focus on the conflicting interests involved in securing financial growth and sustaining continued development in the area. Thus, the different articulations sometimes converge. The distinction lies in the explicitly stated conflict of interest: the needs of local businesses are contrasted with those of the company, perceived as coming from “the

outside”. Is nature, and the businesses dependent on it, to be “sacrificed”? This choice of wording, “sacrifice”, recurs frequently, as does the expressed sense that the consequences of such a sacrifice are marginalized or diminished. This experience is illustrated in the following quote:

They like to say, “People need to sacrifice themselves a little”, as soon as someone doesn’t think wind power is okay. First of all, it’s not a little you sacrifice. We must stop making big problems appear small (Dala-Demokraten 2025).

Emphasizing how the effects of a wind project for residents are downplayed, the writer urges a shift in how the transition conflicts are narrated and how the opposition to such initiatives is addressed. It does not state who “they” are, but the initial critique is set towards “politicians” who have been blinded by the “dream” to save the climate, where the climate is put between question marks. This indicates reluctance to trust climate research and the existence of climate change. It might also suggest that climate change and the solutions in renewable energy through wind turbine establishment are insufficient as a solution. The text continues with an example of an individual sacrifice:

If I have a property I have spent time, money, and work on that I cannot sell – or that decreases drastically in value due to wind turbines (which is scientifically proven) – or that my summer house becomes a nightmare instead of a dream – is that really to “sacrifice yourself a little”? Think again, think with common sense. It is time to show respect for both property owners and landowners, and not least animals and nature (Dala-Demokraten 2024).

Urging those who diminish the consequences to think with common sense, the writer asks for restored respect. Wind power is portrayed as a loss in every regard, pursued only for what is deemed a fantasy. No suggestions for alternative energy sources are mentioned. Signed “A woman standing up for justice, truth, and straightforwardness,” the opinion piece depicts the establishment of wind turbines as a symbol of the opposite, constructing an emic contrast between ideology and common sense. While this piece clearly expresses a rejection of climate change as a reality, such explicit rejection is the exception rather than the norm in the opinion pieces analyzed. The rarity of overt climate-change denial raises questions about the underlying causes of climate rejection when such a position is articulated. An experienced injustice in the costs of establishment can readily be mobilized within macro-level political discourse, where the rejection of climate change serves political purposes that extend beyond the question of energy transition alone. That questions of justice are central to wind-power

conflicts has been concluded elsewhere, both in the Swedish context and internationally (van Wijk et al. 2023; Lindvall 2023). Still, this articulation not only reject the climate crisis, but it also internalizes market rationality as common sense; the criticism expressed here is grounded in the experience of unfair financial loss rather than in a critique of the market logic itself. In a similar manner, another opinion piece concludes that: “Any exploited area would lay a dead hand over hundreds of square kilometres, with greatly reduced property values, and stalled development as a result” (Norrköpings Tidningar 2022).

Finally, also social class is narrated in the question of energy transition, with arguments suggesting that alternative energy sources would be better suited to secure to meeting energy demands:

Now, many of us are forced to live in energy poverty when realism and common sense have given way to pure ignorance and fanatical opposition to nuclear power. I think that access to cheap and secure energy is a human right and a prerequisite for us to be able to keep society together. As in most cases, it is always the poor who pay the price for the whims of the middle class (Barometern OT 2023).

This post reflects the discourse on energy transition on a macro level, revolving around the restoration of nuclear power to meet the energy demand. Here, this is believed to be the solution to ending energy poverty. Wind power is considered an initiative that creates a volatile electricity market, therefore raising the energy prices. Not choosing nuclear would mean risking a development where society falls apart due to increased costs and poverty for “the poor”. Wind power is described as a middle-class idea, where common sense has been replaced with ignorance and irrationality. A form of class-conscious common sense emerges, in which climate politics or renewable energy are portrayed as yet another reflection of societal inequality. In accordance with this logic, nuclear power comes to symbolize stability and equality: it is regarded not only as more reliable in terms of electricity delivery but also as a form of protector for subordinate classes.

To understand why wind power is referred to as yet another whim of the urban middle class, the expression must be situated within a broader context. Swedish regions outside the larger cities have suffered depopulation, with social services shutting down one by one; hospitals, schools, and other societal infrastructure needed to make an area liveable have closed as they have become too expensive to maintain. At the same time, wind power has been established in municipalities across the country (Energimyndigheten 2025). This means that the cities are largely dependent on energy produced elsewhere, while rural areas struggle with functioning infrastructure and liveable conditions. But there is also another dimension to the issue electricity costs in

Sweden, connected to the 2011 decision to divide the energy market into four separate bidding zones. Recent research shows that this division resulted in significantly different energy prices within the country, as well as a general price increase across all zones (Loiacono, Rizzo & Stagnaro 2025). The zones with lower supply faced substantially higher costs, with the southern region being most affected.

The opinion piece cited above is published in a local newspaper from the southern region, possibly reflecting this development. The text implicitly argues for a restoration of everyday rationality, formed through lived reality and material conditions. This articulation can also be understood as a reaction to increasing class differences and as an attempt to counteract these developments by calling for affordable energy for all, favouring nuclear power. These articulations illustrate how the criticism, though multilayered, ultimately positions itself within the dominant discourse on how to mitigate climate change.

Conclusion

The local opinion pieces reveal a complex web of articulations. Although they do not share an ideological starting point, they form a temporary alliance in their rejection of wind power and converge around appeals to common sense. Three main articulations were identified.

The first is a local environmental articulation focused on the negative consequences for local nature and non-human species. It highlights the short lifespan of wind turbines and their long-term impact on the landscape. Alternative solutions—such as installing solar panels on existing buildings—are proposed to avoid altering the environment or harming wildlife. Rather than drawing on a romanticized view of nature, this articulation stresses that the surroundings' function both as habitat and as a foundation for local businesses. Wind power is therefore framed as a threat to local societal viability. Concerns about reduced attractiveness for tourism and related industries reflect a broader neoliberal common sense in Sweden, where rural areas are expected to market themselves as “attractive” through their natural and cultural assets. Responsibility for regional survival is consequently placed on local communities rather than the state.

The second articulation concerns justice and responsibility for transition, highlighting an experienced lack of political influence over environmental change. Wind power projects are described as driven by corporate interests that override local objections, while the costs—ecological and social—fall on local citizens and nature. From this perspective, a social democratic common sense entails rejecting such market-driven logic. Fears are expressed about a democratic decline in which industrial interests can impose disruptive changes on regions. Even the government's proposal for financial

compensation to municipalities hosting wind turbines is interpreted cautiously: there is concern that local politicians may prioritize financial benefits over majority opinion, thereby undermining democratic processes and the local right of veto.

The third articulation revolves around the economic consequences for both the area and individual households. These concerns include potential declines in property values and increases in energy costs. Class becomes central to the critique, as does the rural–urban divide. Wind power is associated with the preferences of an urban middle class, while rural areas are seen as bearing the costs of industrial expansion, reinforcing inequalities between centre and periphery.

The three articulations mirror the dominant interpretations of wind-power resistance in the expressions of land-based rejection and obstruction, but they also extend the discussion by showing how a common sense rejection answers to several contemporary issues, and contribute to the discussion by connecting local, vernacular expressions of discontent in regions across Sweden to the late historical political agreements in the Swedish context.

Contrary to what might be expected, wind power has historically been viewed positively in national surveys. Before the rapid expansion beginning in 2010, rural residents were slightly more positive toward wind power than urban populations (Jönsson 2022). There was a measure of consent. Today, however, public discontent is growing. In Gramscian terms, hegemony is maintained not only through ideology but through consent rooted in everyday common sense. When these common-sense understandings begin to fracture, contradictions within the system become visible, opening space for alternative positions. Conflicts around wind power highlight this dynamic. The articulations identified here – while contradictory – represent different attempts to symbolically resolve these tensions. Their core concerns relate to nature, democracy, private economy, and class. They express a desire to protect local natural values while also reacting to the commodification of nature through financial compensation schemes. They articulate regional self-sufficiency and anxieties about property ownership, reflecting the market logic underpinning Sweden's wind power expansion. Democratic concerns surface particularly around questions of veto power, while criticism of market-oriented establishment policies draws on a social democratic common sense. Finally, critiques of energy prices – framing wind power as an invention of the urban middle class – illustrate how perceived inequalities influence understandings of wind power development.

While critiques of deregulation and market-driven policies can contribute to progressive change by strengthening democratic engagement, they also risk being appropriated in broader political discourses that aim to delay climate action. If this occurs, the climate

crisis and debates over systemic transformation may increasingly become framed as part of a wider “culture war.”

Författarpresentation

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