

NIMBY

(Not In My Back Yard)

The Good the Bad the Ugly

REDWATCH JULY 2013

SOME DEFINITIONS

“An attitude ascribed to persons who object to the siting of something that they regard as detrimental or hazardous in their own neighbourhood while, by implication raising no such objections to similar developments elsewhere” . Oxford English Dictionary (2006)

“Opposition to the locating of something considered undesirable in one's neighbourhood” Merriam Webster Dictionary online (2008)

“the protectionist attitudes and the oppositional tactics adopted by community groups facing an unwelcome development in their neighbourhood (Dear. M. 1992)” Tom Coppens, Nimby as a self fulfilling construct, 43rd ISOCARP

Congress 2007

The word NIMBY — an acronym for Not In My Back Yard and a shorthand reference for a perceived grouchy neighbourhood opposition to everything from homeless shelters to wind turbines

Source: Brendon Kennedy, NIMBYism: Nay-saying grumps or neighbourhood activists? The Star.com Toronto August 2010

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

The concept gained academic attention since the 80s and originates mostly from US scholars, typically to explain strong local opposition to the siting of social facilities, waste incinerators, nuclear waste, power plants, wind turbines, new road infrastructure

Source: Tom Coppens, Nimby as a self fulfilling construct, 43rd ISOCARP Congress 2007

THE DEBATES

NIMBY is unhelpful in explaining local opposition.

The conventional view that more ‘information’ and (authoritative) ‘knowledge’ is the solution to the ‘problem’ of local opposition is questionable.

The debate is not simply one of knowledge vs. ignorance, but of clash of values.

Importance of replacing antagonism of ‘supporter’ vs. ‘opposer’ with more nuanced sense of varieties of positions within and between these positions.

Potential of ‘problem-solving’ approach through deliberation and identification of any of shared values.

Source: *Renewable Energy and the Discourses of Objection*, Geraint Ellis, John Barry, Clive Robinson, Queen’s University, Belfast PowerPoint Presentation

IS IT ECONOMICALLY RATIONAL?

Economists and game theorists explain NIMBY behaviour in terms of social dilemma's (Wolsink 1994).

Public goods provide advantages or benefits for society as a whole, but the disadvantages or costs in terms of increased risk, decreasing land prices, pollution, noise, etc. are concentrated on the local level.

Local residents feel that they are saddled with the negative aspects of something that yields them a low positive return. NIMBYism is thus a mix of public goods and private bads.

Under the condition of selfish and strictly rational economic behaviour, the local residents will either oppose the development or will try to locate it elsewhere.

Source: Tom Coppens, Nimby as a self fulfilling construct, 43rd ISOCARP Congress 2007

NIMBYISM AS STIGMA

[Some academics] have argued that the NIMBY language frame acts as a stigmatizing concept, giving power to proponents to justify their position and to marginalise the position of the opposing parties...

Many authors have advocated abandoning the concept completely in the light of the critiques ..., its inability to explain local opposition and its indiscriminate use... They advocate explaining local opposition as a multidimensional issue, in which structural, institutional, historical and contextual factors play an important role.

Despite the critique among scholars, the language of NIMBYism is still pervasive, especially among practitioners, such as urban planners and politicians.

Source: Tom Coppens, Nimby as a self fulfilling construct, 43rd ISOCARP Congress 2007

IS NIMBYISM HARD WIRED?

“Australian social planner and ethicist Dr Wendy Sarkissian ... believes that so-called NIMBY responses to housing density increases are both reasonable and helpful”.

“Dr Sarkissian argues that neighbours are resisting proposed higher density housing because humans, like all animals, are hard-wired to protect our territories. Further, the ‘core territory’ of home is one to which we have the strongest place attachment. It has strong symbolic as well as psychological importance. Naturally, instinctively, we will defend our homes and neighbourhoods at all cost.”

**Source: Abstract: NIMBY responses to higher density housing: *It's all in your mind* – University of South Australia
Adelaide, 29 May 2013**

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF NIMBY

“NIMBYitis is the inflammation of the entitlement gland,” chuckles Boston College psychology professor Joe Tecce.

“If someone lives on a street for a long time, there is the feeling, conscious or not, that ‘I own this street,’ or at least, ‘I am the mayor of this street.’”

New people bring change and unpredictability into a neighbourhood, which causes stress.

“The greater the insecurity of the person, the more they’re projecting their ego beyond their skin,” Tecce says. “In effect, people are resistant to change because they’re not confident in handling change.”

Source: Brendon Kennedy, NIMBYism: Nay-saying grumps or neighbourhood activists? The Star.com Toronto August 2010

REALITY OR ANXIETY?

NIMBY opposition reflects the concerns of neighbouring residents that their lives will change for the worse.

Sometimes these concerns are real and rational, based on a measurable impacts. More often, they are based on stereotype and anxiety about the new residents or the properties they will live in.

Whether based in reason or emotion, however, opponents' views are generally deeply held. Both the rational and emotive arguments must be taken into consideration...

Source: Tony Gilmour | Elton Consulting, Overcoming NIMBY Opposition to Developing Affordable Housing 2012

THE ARGUMENTS

Financial - the new scheme might lower property values.

Social - there will be undesirable people moving into the neighbourhood who will pose a threat to personal security or engage in anti-social activity.

Amenity - more people in the area could place a strain on neighbourhood resources.

Source: Tony Gilmour | Elton Consulting, Overcoming NIMBY Opposition to Developing Affordable Housing 2012

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK

- **Does the Development need to happen somewhere? (Is there a greater good?)**
- **Are there local problems from the Development? (Is there a local bad?)**
- **What are problems - do they stand up to testing? (Are they real or imagined?)**
- **Can the real problems be fixed or can they be compensated for?**
- **Would you support it elsewhere? Do the problems go away for people if it is moved or does that create same or more problems?**

Source: Geoffrey Turnbull REDWatch July 2013

GOOD NIMBY

- **Fact-based research and documentation to support your cause.**
- **Empirical evidence and precedence.**
- **An eye for the bigger picture.**
- **Widespread support.**
- **Proactive approach.**
- **“What I would hope is that we had a more sophisticated knowledge of how we build cities; that cities are organic and they grow . . . It’s when they’re static that negative things start to happen.”**

Source: Brendon Kennedy, NIMBYism: Nay-saying grumps or neighbourhood activists? The Star.com Toronto August 2010

BAD NIMBY

- **Misinformation.**
- **Complete self-interest.**
- **Anti-change attitudes.**
- **Personal attacks on public officials [and those that disagree].**
- **Always reactive.**
- **“In some cases, NIMBYism has nothing to do with the neighbourhood, it only has to do with property values. ... But even bad NIMBYism is better than apathy.**

Source: Brendon Kennedy, NIMBYism: Nay-saying grumps or neighbourhood activists? The Star.com Toronto August 2010

YOU DECIDE

Today, the NIMBY label is flung like mud at any locally based group opposed to any new development in their community.

But are NIMBYs the obstinate, anti-progressive curmudgeons their opponents claim? Or are they citizen superheroes — the strong-willed conscience of communities contending with relentless development and an unresponsive bureaucracy?

Source: Brendon Kennedy, NIMBYism: Nay-saying grumps or neighbourhood activists? The Star.com Toronto August 2010

ABOUT REDWATCH

REDWatch is a residents and friends group covering the Sydney Australia suburbs of Redfern Eveleigh Darlington and Waterloo (the same area covered historically by the Redfern Waterloo Authority). REDWatch monitors government activities and seeks to ensure community involvement in all decisions made about the area. More details can be found at www.redwatch.org.au.

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