

The Winds of the Wieringerpolder

From Climate Concerns to Contested Development in
Wieringermeer, The Netherlands.



Wietske van der Klei

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Frontpage Figure | Source: Red de Wieringermeerbode Nr.1. Januari 7th, 2021.



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Figure 1 | The Datacentre from Microsoft, Greenhouses,; and Wind Turbines from Vattenfall(Obbink 2021).

Map | Wieringermeer



NRC 060620 / RJ / Bron: Provincie Noord Holland

Figure 2: Map of the Wieringermeer

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Prologue | A Story from the Wieringermeer

This story¹ is a journey to the Wieringerpolder in the Netherlands. A place where farmers grew and locally processed potatoes, sugar beets, grains, and flower bulbs on seemingly endless green farmlands under a blue sky. Until the year 2000, most people were content with this rural way of life. However, some people thought it was time to initiate change because nothing extraordinary ever happened in the polder.

The Hiemstra family reckoned it was time for an upgrade and bought large land parcels to realize their vision of increased agricultural production by greenhouse developments. This investment proved very profitable as the highway connecting Wieringermeer to Amsterdam transported people and products in only thirty minutes from one end to another². The councillors of the municipality were very happy with the increased economic activities in their area.

Not many polder residents were interested in working for the greenhouses due to the low salaries. The employment company saw their chance to attract guest workers from mostly Eastern European countries to fill this void. Economic growth was the magical word, and everyone was happy. Well, everyone? Where all those new people had to sleep, shower, and eat was of far less interest for them. The local council dove into the matter and ‘solved’ it by changing local zoning plans, which provoked a lot of local critique and resistance. The greenhouses and their employees became increasingly important for the local governance, and the residents increasingly less since they were never satisfied anyway.

At the same time, fossil induced climate change caused problems on the entire globe. Fortunately, quite a few very clever minds advised extracting more energy from wind-, solar-, and water movement energy, conveniently named ‘green energy’. And yes, some innovative farmers from Wieringermeer already built such a beautiful ‘green’ wind turbine on their land. These wind turbines were a great idea! No lack of space (yet) in the municipality; thus, why not increase its development? Of course, the polder residents were not overly excited about the idea of building vast amounts of giant turbines, but they came anyway. The people could surely understand their necessity for Mother earth, and they would also provide renewable electricity for hundreds of thousands of houses. More than enough reason to go forward with the plans.

¹ This text is based on the stories published in the Red de Wieringermeerbode [Safe the Wieringermeer newspaper]

² The Netherlands is a small and very densely populated country and while the Wieringermeer is considered by the Dutch to be remote and rural this often not complies to international standards. Thus, the distance between Wieringermeer and Amsterdam [the airport] is for most people only a short ride.

The polder municipality is way too small for such incredible developments, declared the biggest boss in the Dutch country. Yes, it would be much wiser to fuse multiple municipalities into one big one, responded the province chief. The people, involving them a bit as well, were allowed to help choose the name of the new municipality, and thus Hollands Kroon came into being. A good name for this area, which had everything to do with agriculture and livestock, and ... yes, also colossal wind turbines. By giving its control to the independent committee, the municipality could be managed without too much resistance and time-consuming procedures after its creation. That was certainly much more practical at the beginning of Hollands Kroon. However, when the big techno giants Microsoft and Google built their datacentres in Hollands Kroon, they took over the green energy business and used it for a destructive industry. Wieringermeer started to transform into an industrial area, and so the story goes on.

Introduction

This bachelor thesis interrogates the contestations generated and resulting from wind energy development in the Wieringermeer³ area of the Netherlands. Known locally as the *Wieringerpolder*, this region is part of the municipality of Hollands Kroon located in the north of the province Noord-Holland and has been subject to twenty years of large-scale corporate developments, which has no end in sight. These developments started with the construction of greenhouses that first designated the area as interesting for national and international economic development. The arrival of the windfarm development in this region is primarily the result of Wieringermeer being an excellent site for wind energy generation. Wind energy has become an essential element of green economies and a cornerstone of climate change mitigation. While the renewable energy transition derives from climate concerns, ethnographic based findings suggest that the green economy follows the same extractive logic of the fossil fuel sector and causes similar disharmony (e.g., Argenti & Knight 2015; Boyer 2011; 2014; Dunlap 2017; 2021; Howe 2014; Mitchell 2009; 2011). An example in the Wieringermeer is the construction of large datacentres and multinationals attracted to the area because of the availability of energy generated by the windfarm. For the local residents, the *Wieringers*⁴, the ongoing developments are another example of the undesirable industrialisation that impacts the quality of their wide-open agricultural landscape. However, this perception is not only based on the arrival of multinationals or the visual changes in the area, but also on the *processes* of the developments, which many residents define as undemocratic, unjust, and unequal.

Energy is one of the significant generative forces behind the global economy and the world's interdependency. However, global society has arrived at a point where more energy is needed than readily available, while the world contends with rising carbon levels that lead to climate change and environmental degradation (Bell & Ashwood 2015; Eriksen & Schober 2017, 50), resulting in competition for energy production space and tense (inter-)national politics (Argenti & Knight 2015; Barry 2012; Boyer 2011; 2014; Dunlap 2017; 2021; Mitchell 2009; 2011; Pérez et al. 2019). Climate change not only endangers the stability of the physical environment but affects all aspects of human life, including a sense of cultural identity, well-

³ The Wieringermeer is the official name of my research site. Throughout my thesis I use local notions of the area as well, for example, the *Wieringerpolder*, or the *polder*.

⁴ The *Wieringers* are the people who inhabit the Wieringermeer. Note that when using the notions 'inhabitant', 'resident', or 'local population' I refer to the people who call the area their 'home'. This does not include most of the seasonal workers nor most of the politicians from the Municipality Hollands Kroon who do not live in the Wieringermeer they govern.

being, and security (Berkes 2017; Barry & Woods 2016; Fiske et al. 2014, 13-14; Howe 2014). These manifestations are multidimensional as they result from human-induced alterations of the natural world (Bell & Ashwood 2015, 11-32), creating problems so complex and seemingly unsolvable that they are often defined as 'grand challenges' or 'wicked problems' (Ferraro et al. 2015; Batie 2008)⁵. There are many discussions and disagreements on climate change, but there is general agreement in the scientific world that reducing greenhouse gas emissions is vital for slowing global climate change (e.g., Elkjaer et al. 2020). Wind energy production is justified in the Wieringermeer as a countermeasure of anthropogenic climate change, sustainable development, and the transition to cleaner forms of energy production (Urgenda 2019; Vattenfall 2019; Planviewer 2020; Hollands Kroon 2020). However, as this thesis will address, the story of wind energy is more complicated than its advocates would have us believe.

This research focuses on the impingement of residents lived experiences towards their place identity due to the windfarm and related economic developments, including greenhouses and datacentres, in Wieringermeer, the Netherlands. In conducting this research, the main focus has been to ascertain the question:

How do Windfarm Constructions and Related Economic Developments Affect Place Identity and Attachment of the Wieringermeer Residents?

It is no coincidence that the windfarm is placed in the Wieringermeer. The Netherlands was the first state in which citizens successfully forced their government to actively reduce emissions by signing the legally binding 'Climate Act' in 2019 (Urgenda, 2019). According to Michael Gerrard (in Buranyi 2020), the Dutch case is the "strongest climate change decision ever issued by a court" and the only one that has forced government policy, making the Netherlands a proving ground for other environmental lawsuits worldwide (Ibid). The legal changes show how democratic influences can successfully challenge strategies and policies of powerful energy structures. The Wieringermeer Windfarm⁶ is one of the projects resulting from the new laws and significant development in the quest for a renewable-based energy network in the Netherlands. The windfarm is owned by the Swedish energy company Vattenfall, who promoted it as a major advancement for the Dutch renewable energy transition (Vattenfall

⁵ Knowledge of climate change and the renewable energy transition is essential for comprehending topics discussed in my thesis. I recommend *Bell and Ashwood 2015* for more information on the topic.

⁶ As this was the original name of the windfarm, only to be changed to the Princess Ariane Windfarm during the opening ceremony by Vattenfall. During the fieldwork it became apparent that the residents do not refer to the windfarm by its new and official name but keep referring to it as the Wieringermeer Windfarm.

2019). The Dutch government used the same prospects for reducing emissions to justify their subsidies for this project in the name of the Climate Act (Buranyi 2020). However, none of this renewable energy became part of the national energy network; instead, it is sold to powerful international corporations such as Microsoft (Ekker 2020). While the Wieringermeer Windfarm was framed as an effort to address climate change and as a resource for its citizens, it actually represents an industrial opportunity (Pérez et al. 2019, 2-3) because the energy is perceived as a profitable commodity (Appadurai 1988, 3-6) rather than as a resource for citizens.

The findings of this study provide an understanding of the social impact of renewable energy production. Moreover, this study will highlight an approach to the renewable energy transition that encourages the consideration of social and cultural meanings in decision-making processes rather than purely economic imperatives. The study was conducted at the windfarm located in the Wieringermeer area in the Netherlands, focusing on residents' experiences and their perspectives of the interactions between them and other stakeholders involved in the developments around their homes. The principles of enquiry are place identity, stakeholder engagement, and energopower structures. A primary focus was the degree to which the windfarm and related economic developments impacted on residents' place identity in Wieringermeer. The notion 'sense-of-place' was used to determine what the residents perceived to be part of their local area and culture. The development of large-scale industry in the form of windfarms, greenhouses, and datacentres makes a substantial impact on the landscape, and this was a primary focus for many residents who felt their place identity was being contested by the arrival of wind energy and the associated development. This first focus of the study lays the foundation for the second and third sub-questions devoted to the position of the Wieringermeer residents (people) in the decision-making processes (power) of the local economic developments (profit).

Another focus was the form and level of engagement between the residents and the windfarm and associated economic development businesses. Their willingness and ability to engage and the attitudes of the developers and authorities towards engagement with residents before and during the decision-making processes underpinned much of the research. A third focus follows this topic by examining the structures of energopower that influenced energy production and related economic developments in the Wieringermeer. The ability of residents to engage is often conditional upon their ability to understand and navigate the often complex decision-making processes that multinationals and governments negotiate on a daily basis. In

effect, amateurs are coming up against economic and political professionals who are more familiar with the process and, to a degree, insulated by the actual or perceived energopower structure.

Methods & Ethics

To collect data, I conducted (n)ethnographic research in the Wieringermeer from the 8th of February until the 7th of May (12 weeks). Carrying out cultural anthropological research during the COVID-19⁷ pandemic was challenging because ‘real’ contact with the research population and data collection usually depends upon intensive longitudinal contact through participant observation. The data was collected through the methods of participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and (n)ethnography, and kept in a logbook, research journal, and diary. The research population consisted of residents of Wieringermeer and people otherwise related to the developments in the area.

Perhaps more than any other discipline, anthropology embodies the ambition to gain insight into human diversity and complexity through an analysis of “the *native*’s point of view, *his* relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world” (Malinowski 1944, 25). In order to establish a holistic view of the lived experiences of the Wieringermeer residents, I secured interviews with stakeholders who had varied opinions about the topic. I conducted nine semi-structured interviews and attended one meeting of the workgroup ‘Red de Wieringermeer’⁸, which were performed online, recorded, and transcribed. Additionally, the research site has been visited twice to increase my connection and understanding with the research context and collected data. Furthermore, many online observations were processed into extended fieldnotes and added to the data.

There is a high level of distrust among the residents, and the current uncertainty surrounding development in the area exacerbates this problem for researchers. The Wieringermeer is one of the least densely populated areas of the Netherlands, so most residents, local politicians, and businesses are easily identifiable. To guarantee anonymity, pseudonyms are used for all participants of this study. Furthermore, some data has been discarded, despite being useful,

⁷ Adding my personal complication of living with chronic long problems and being part of the high-risk group during this pandemic.

⁸ The name of the workgroup ‘Red de Wieringermeer’ translates into ‘Save the Wieringermeer’, and thus clearly reflects the workgroup’s objective. The original Dutch name will be used throughout the thesis.

because I could not guarantee the anonymity of some participants⁹. All anthropological research runs the risk of impinging upon participants' rights to privacy and anonymity, what Dunlap (2017, 25) called the "dark, and in my experience, neglected underside that is taken for granted by most practitioners and students of the discipline". My research follows the Code of Ethics maintained by the American Anthropological Association (AAA 2012) and is approved by FERB (Faculty Ethical Review Board) of the UU (University Utrecht), but I remain aware that uncritical anthropologists with good intentions can unwittingly provide information to government and corporate actors and others (Dunlap 2017), which endangers the most important anthropological research moral "do no harm!" (AAA 2012). Like Robbins (1996, 343), I have approached my research with an understanding that "doing the right thing" requires a "sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the micropolitics in local areas" and I have made this my ethos when conducting research in the Wieringermeer. This thesis aspires to such warnings for ethnographical studies but carries the warning that I am also shaped by, and part of, the industrial economy.

Reading Guide

In the following chapters of this thesis, we will explore the residents' perspectives on the contestations generated and resulting from wind energy development in the Wieringermeer area of the Netherlands. In the upcoming chapter I establish my theoretical framework by developing a theoretical stance in the academic literature regarding place, identity, and the power in the renewable energy transition. In the second chapter we will take a closer look at the context of the contested developments in Wieringermeer. Subsequently, the theoretical analysis relates to the empirical findings derived from the (n)ethnographic research. Thus, in the third and fourth chapter, I demonstrate the how place identity and attachment is threatened by structures of energopower. In the concluding remarks I will recapitulate the most important findings of my research to come to an answer of the research question. Moreover, I critically evaluate my research in the light of the theoretical frame and empirical findings, thereby opening up a discussion for further fields of study.

⁹ Before this measurement was applied, I discussed the related data with the participants to consider their concerns and find alternatives that retained meaning while simultaneously protecting their anonymity. Unfortunately, this could not be achieved in all cases and some of the content was subsequently discarded from the analysis. Nonetheless, the insights gained have been integrated in the thesis by using empirical sources.

Chapter 1 | Theoretical Framework

There is a growing awareness of the unavoidable impact of global capitalism on the environment and the extent to which capital itself is a key driver of climate change. This crisis is both global and highly localised. Studies focus mainly on the consequences of climate change and local mitigation measures (e.g., Fiske et al. 2014) but do not often consider the impacts of those climate change mitigations themselves, including wind energy development. It is conceded that this theoretical framework has relatively few ethnographies on climate change mitigations and few ethnographies from countries, and social groups within them, which are the largest emitters of greenhouse gases (Stensrud & Eriksen 2019, ix). Furthermore, these countries, including Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands, often play a leading role in promoting renewable energy targets and climate negotiations (Elkjaer et al. 2020, 1). After introducing basic concepts, examples of windfarm developments in Mexico and Greece are employed to gain cross-cultural perspectives. The imperative is not to show the *differences* but rather how they are *similar*. A factor in understanding the data collected for this research was cognisant that “often, culture is ‘invisible [assumed to be normal, or just the way things are] until it is placed in comparison to another culture.” (Kottak 2015, 2) Please take this ethnological perspective into account when considering this ethnographical research for which the theoretical framework forms the intellectual foundation.

§ 1.1 | An Anthropology of Place and Identity

There is a lot of confusion about terminology and conceptual models within place-related identity studies (Gordon 2010, 759). Still, it is generally agreed that the bonds between persons and places are interactive processes that mutually form each other (e.g., Peng et al. 2020). Cultural life does not take place in a vacuum because “things, ideas, practices, and emotions all occur in a context, in a broader world that influences, values, celebrates, regulates, criminalises, sneers, or tuts at particular activities and objects” (Anderson 2015, 3). We attach cultural meanings to places; they become “saturated with cultural meanings”, and the words like “our ‘home’, our ‘backyard’, our ‘turf’” (ibid, 51) resonate and fortify our inclusion. Conversely, when we are removed from our ‘place’ to another country, city, or village, we can feel “‘out of place’, *displaced*, ... outsiders in particular places” (ibid). Without “place”, it is difficult for us to locate ourselves in the world. Our environment influences many aspects of our everyday life, yet it is so apparent, ordinary, and natural that it is often overlooked when we think of our identity. As Cresswell (in Sharp et al. 2000, 263) states: “the fish don’t talk about the water”. In our everyday lives, we are often like the fish in that we do not talk about its physical context. If you tried to explain to the fish that they were in water, they would say: “Water? What is water?” They are surrounded by it, and that is why the water is impossible to see. This is where anthropologists step in to make the familiar exotic and the exotic familiar.

Place & Space

The first distinction to point out is the ‘principle of space’ compared to the ‘principle of place.’ Place is often thought of in terms of national or political territories and physical landscapes, with clear identifiable contexts which may be defined by particular languages, laws, and customs that may be different or similar to our own (Anderson 2015, 3-5). Place, in this sense, refers to meanings people connect to a specific physical area (Jaffe & De Koning 2016, 21-55). There are many different scales in which place exists, ranging from the house where people live to the streets, shops, neighbourhood, village, and beyond. Such a place “comes into existence when people give meaning to a part of the larger, undifferentiated space in which they live” (Gordon 2010, 760). If space is where culture is lived, that means place contains its results.

The terms place and space are often substituted from one another in everyday speech. However, for anthropologists, there is a marked difference. When we think of all the *places* in the world we have visited, we do not think of them as *spaces*. They are places with different people, different lives, living in different environments with different identities. Seeing the world as a world of places is “a political as much as an intellectual move” (Agnew 2004 in Anderson 2015, 51). The world is interrelated, interconnected, and interdependent while being quite disconnected geographically, but somehow people organise themselves in nations, with national politics and a feeling of nation-ness (Eriksen 2002). This contradiction is present in both the intellectual and political worlds. For this research on renewable energy transition, it means that there is a lot of generally agreed global knowledge on climate change that is strategical, political, and ideologically employed at national and local levels to induce change for more sustainability. The process of transforming such abstract space into meaningful and concrete places is defined as ‘place-making’ and often starts through marking physical spatial boundaries (Jaffe & De Koning 2016, 21-55).

Place Attachment & Place Identity

The second important distinction is that of ‘place attachment’ and ‘place identity’. Place attachment is generally understood to be a person’s bond with specific locations that make them feel comfortable and safe, established through positive associated memories, feelings, meanings, and beliefs (Gordon 2010, 760; Devine-Wright 2009; 2013; Peng et al. 2020; Faccioli et al. 2020). In brief, place attachment stands for a person’s relation to and perception of a place. While place attachment is a distinct notion, it is also related to place identity. Proshansky (1978, 155) was the first to introduce the concept of place identity, defining it as “those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioural tendencies relevant to a specific environment”. His definition shows overlap between the two concepts but is still most influential. Nature and humans are mutually forming identities (van de Leeuw 2019, 1-2) in the global context of climate change, for example, but, paradoxically, cultural studies and geographers have shown that humans often make meaning *before* designating an area a “place”. To clarify, place attachment means the process through which people assign meaning to a place and establish place identity (Jaffe & De Koning 2016, 21-55; Gordon 2010, 760-761). In

addition, few sources describe how this process functions and how it can be quantified. One recent study by Peng et al. (2020, 12-13) provides that place attachment establishes place identity through the *interactive* process between people and place. They explain that a specific place influences and forms personal, social, or cultural identity, and in return, people's perspectives on a specific place construct its meaning. Devine-Wright (2009, 437-438) created a framework for "understanding the psychological aspects of place change by connecting literatures on place attachment with the psychology of social representations and identity processes". Thus, the process of place-making, as explained above, can be perceived as an interactive process. The corollary is that changes to a place can also influence the identity of the people associated with that place. While the meaning of place is often perceived to be static, my research correlates with Stuart Hall's (1996, 4) contention that the bonds and identities between humans and places are not about "[...] who we are' or where we came from' but ... [are] ... a process of becoming rather than being". This refutes the notion that place and identity are often perceived (or desired to be) non-changing. It is more important to look at processes of "becoming" rather than "being", which is crucial to understanding the research I have undertaken.

A sense of place is the "emotional, experiential, and affective traces that tie humans into particular environments ... a key to which humans, culture and environment are united" (Anderson 2015, 53-56). We instinctively act to protect culturally significant places, often without understanding why we are doing it. We want to save the old church in our village or the park that we used to use as children. We feel outraged if these places are desecrated. We can even feel the attachment others might have to their place – the empathy for someone who has lost their home in a fire or must sell their house so that a new freeway can be built. It is not empathy for an economy – the insurance will compensate for the fire, and the government will pay for compulsorily acquiring the house. We empathise with the loss of identity because consciously or unconsciously, we recognise the important place makes to our identity. It is why some places are celebrated, consecrated, commemorated, and protected and – in a negative sense – why some have been burned, bombed, sacked, and obliterated. If you leave no trace of the place, there will soon be no trace of the culture. This is what many people fear when changes are imposed upon them in the name of the renewable energy transition.

Place Change & Place Disruption

Change is core to the renewable energy transition and includes the change of energy resources, construction technologies, but also to the places of production, distribution and consumption. In addition, changes are made to the knowledge, information, and ‘truth’ that guide energy and government policies (Fried 2000, 193-198; Berkes 2017). Scientists have an ongoing interest in how change might influence the interactive relationship between people and place, whether it is due to external or internal forces. Some find change a “disruption” to place attachment or a “threat” to place identity (Dixon & Durrheim 2004; Kopec & Bliss 2020), and others view physical change even as central to processes of segregation (Jaffe & De Koning 2016, 87-101) or cultural genocide (e.g., Dunlap 2017; 2021). In response to change, the attitude and approach of groups may be influenced by “technology ... the cultural importance placed upon cooperation, ingenuity, tradition, and scores of other values; the availability of education ... the historical interplay between nature and society ... [and] ... the influence of media on the overall narrative of the environment and how it should be treated” (Overtyon 2017). Scientists generally agree that change is a disruptive force that visualises the usually invisible connections between a person and a certain place. Note that disruption to place does not necessitate an actual physical change, as disruption can also result from psychological anxiety or a sense of threat at possible outcomes or future change (Devine-Wright 2009, 426-431). The social representations theory from Moscovici (2001) explains these non-physical causes of disruption through the emphasis of knowledge as socially constructed by processes of content and power. As such, change does not only have a physical impact but also a social one, specifically on social networks. These can result in emotional reactions, such as a feeling of displacement that might even lead to psychological issues (Fried 2000, 193-198).

§ 1.2 | The Power in the Renewable Energy Transition

The previous section focused on place change and disruption explained as a threat to place identity. This section positions politics, economics, and society in a power framework that regulates that decision-making processes for renewable energy transition, with a particular focus on windfarm developments. Michel Foucault was hugely influential in shaping anthropological understandings of power, as he diverged from the idea that people or groups wielded power. He found instead that “power is everywhere,” “comes from everywhere,” and could only be constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understandings, and “truth” (Foucault 1998, 62-64). Dunlap (2017, 27) described the interrelationship between the political state and economy as “constantly working for and negotiating the consolidation of state power in relation to expansive micro and macro-economic policies and interests at the local, national and international level”. The offspring of this co-habitation are new philosophies like green capitalism and energopower. Groups espousing energy democracy have attempted to fight against market rule in order to find new ways that energy might be produced, distributed, and owned. The key division is the power structure that, despite some resistance, continues to uphold “the systematic growth trajectory of [a] political economy ... intimately tied to the shifting and adapting architecture of the state and its institutions—both the private/public sectors” (Dunlap 2017, 27). In a modern world where much of the citizenry are sceptical, the decision-makers have employed what Ferguson (1990, 178) called “a technocratic discourse to promote an image of neutrality to manage conflict”. For those impacted by the transition to renewable energy, the idea of “being heard” might become a feat too difficult to achieve.

Green Capitalism

A prominent study on green capitalism by Mitchell (2009; 2011) describes how energy resources have shaped international political power dynamics through their interlinkage with economic growth. Exclusivity in decision-making ensured that fossil fuels are controlled by powerful actors who continue to influence energy decision-making at all levels. The power of these multinationals is immense, and locals are outmatched when attempting to influence decisions that affect their sources of power, even as this power continues to influence them (Burke & Stephens 2018, 79-88). Kirsch (2009, 87-93) explains how mining companies in the contemporary capitalist system adapt to the new ‘sustainable’ trends by redefining the meaning of the concept to corporate profits and economic development that will outlast the life of a

mining project. They promote their use of new ‘cleaner’ technologies to indicate that they are *sustainable miners* who deliver *clean coal*. These are oxymoronic terms (Kirsch 2009, 91-92) because mining can never be sustainable due to the environmental destruction the results from bringing a product to the market that used to store CO₂ underground and instead sends it back into the atmosphere. Renewable energy sounds so much more natural and sustainable than fossil fuels, but it is very oxymoronic. As explained by Stover (2011), “there is one big problem, unless you are planning to live without electricity and motorized transportation, you need more than just wind, water, sunlight, and plants for energy. you need raw materials, real estate, and other things that *will* run out one day. You need stuff that has to be mined, drilled, transported, and bulldozed – not simply harvested or farmed. You need non-renewable resources.”

Energopower

The term ‘extractive logic’ has been coined to describe removing (extracting) resources from the environment in order to gain profit while simultaneously degrading the environment by leaving pollution, destroying habitat, and other undesirable effects. It is mainly associated with mining but always leaves the burden of the residual negative effects with the local community. Boyer (2011; 2014) developed the notion of ‘energopower’ to explain that the extractive logic of fossil fuels continues with renewable energy developments because energy of all kinds is still perceived as a profitable commodity. He defines energopower as “a genealogy of modern power that rethinks political power through the twin analytics of electricity and fuel” (Boyer 2014, 325). In other words, it is the political effort to dominate the economic process of harnessing electricity and fuel, to maintain control of communities. Indeed, the transition to renewable energy, including wind energy, is fundamentally a political effort to confront and destabilise the dominant systems of economic energy power (Burke & Stephens 2018, 78). To shift business away from fossil fuels, governments must coerce businesses with grants and subsidies that will bridge the profitability gap between renewable and fossil fuel energies. Renewable energy can be produced locally and in small quantities, so it has the capability to distribute economic and political power to far more actors (Becker & Naumann 2017; Faccioli et al. 2020). Nonetheless, the transformation to renewable energy tends to be undemocratic and unequal (Barry & Woods 2016, 405-410). To explain forms of democratic renewable energy, it is important to understand how energopower structures facilitate national (Howe 2014) and

international (Argenti & Knight 2015) political control in, for example, windfarm constructions.

Howe's (2014) work shows how the construction of the windfarms in Mexico was challenged by politics of resistance and local perceptions of environmental threat. This publication illustrates the more theoretically oriented approach of Boyer (2011; 2014) and his conceptualisation of energopower. Howe describes the ethical consequences in Mexico that resulted from developers treating the wind as an elemental force to be transformed into a commodity rather than as a culturally significant component of the social practices of the Indigenous communities. To reduce wind to a mere product that could be bought and sold was to violate its local meaning. He concludes that this case represents winds around the world; they should never be reduced to their kinetic value but instead interpreted through their cultural and cosmological worth.

Argenti and Knight (2015) also found strong energopower structures in their study of windfarms in Greece, highlighting the presence of this disruptive influence in Europe. However, despite energopower in Mexico being an attempt by the state to decentralise traditional political institutions, energopower in Greece was deliberately imposed by foreign forces in the name of development. Though the word 'development' implies advancement to something 'superior', development robs "peoples of different cultures of the opportunity to define the forms of their social life" (Esteva 1992, 6-7). In the case of Greece, this development is perceived as foreign interference that not only degrades their democratic rights but also harms their environment and their Greek identity. An informant narrates this in Argenti and Knight's (2015, 781) research as being a form of colonialism: "these are the new occupying forces; we have become the great estate of Europe. The Germans have returned to take our land, to rape us of our resources. With their technology they take our sun, with their austerity they cripple our nation. And now the same rocks upon which we stand are no longer Greek." Something Dunlap (2021) refers to as 'cultural genocide'.

The current grand challenges, including climate change, are predominantly due to extensive power structures exploiting natural resources. Consequently, the goal might now be how such grand challenges can be resolved through democratic processes to ensure that power is widely and equitably distributed through legitimate means, notwithstanding the definition of Mees et al. (2014, 672) who call legitimacy "the acceptance of authority and justification of political power" while also considering the many different actors now involved in the process of governance.

Energy Democracy

The concept of energopower (Boyer 2011; 2014) considers power dynamics as subject to dominant energy systems but allows the inclusion of additional perspectives on the problems related to undemocratic processes and the resulting local opposition. The term energy democracy has evolved from a slogan used by activists demanding a greater say in energy-related decision-making to a term used in academic literature and political documents on energy governance and energy transitions (e.g., Szulecki & Overland 2020). The Climate Act in the Netherlands, as explained previously, is an example of the successful opposition to government policy that resulted in a legally binding obligation. There are also political efforts to open energy systems to local participation (Becker & Naumann 2017, 2-4). For example, the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio produced Agenda 21, a global plan of local action to realise sustainable development, including the prevention of energy insecurity (Barry 2012; Barry & Woods 2016).

The examples of windfarm developments in Mexico and Greece highlight change as the manifestation of place attachment and place identity in the form of local environmental knowledge and place protective actions. Environmental attitudes and place identity beliefs are among the most important drivers of environmental behavior and place protective action (Faccioli et al. 2020; Devine-Wright 2009) because people with an attachment to a certain place are likely to support the preservation of that place so that its meaning, or place identity, stays the same (Faccioli et al. 2020, 2-3).

Energy democracy is a fluid concept as it relies on transforming energy concerns and values, people's opinions and definitions, and citizen participation (Becker & Naumann 2017; Szulecki & Overland 2020). My perception of energy democracy is the political and economic participation of local stakeholders within energy-related organizations and their input in the planning and development of energy projects. As stated previously, when structures of energopower result in new energy infrastructures that promote inequalities, the demand for energy democracy within those systems will increase. This is evidenced by the previous example of RIO and the Climate Act. The emergence of these trends portends a way out of the current structure towards more equitable and sustainable energy policies, often a result of localised actions that are sometimes the best remedy for the failings of the current system (Juris 2008, 11).

Energy democracy could be seen as the offspring of democracy's social contract – the act of citizens giving up part of their natural rights in order to benefit from the protections or

welfare delivered by the state. However, governments often “intervene not to protect humanity from the existential threat of fossil fuels, but to protect the fossil fuel industry from the existential threat of public protest” (Monbiot 2019). This is not very surprising since fossil fuels are used not only for transport but are in many ways fundamental for the organization of societies in terms of infrastructure, governance, and power relations (Mitchell 2009, 402-405). This is not only a national process but an international one as well, which can be seen in the global trajectory of the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2015).

Energy democracy seems to be more closely aligned with the principles of the social contract, for example, whereas green capitalism is akin to a modern-day *laissez-faire* economy with the economic actors free to generate profits indiscriminately with only limited *real* interference from governments. The power in the renewable energy transition is a function of the agency and structure dualism at the centre of much socio-anthropological work. Whether green capitalism, energopower or energy democracy, all are human-made structures that offer something in return for the abdication of democratic rights. Participants in this study who bemoaned their lack of agency obviously prefer the structure to shift in one direction, even as multinationals and authorities appease rather than acquiesce. In which way the structure may shift in the future is yet to be decided.

Chapter 2 | Research Context

Suppose we take a peep into Holland, the home of the Dutch people. It is a very flat country, looking, for all the world, like a big green field all cut up by lines of shining water, called canals, and dotted everywhere with gaily painted, red-roofed houses, nearly all just alike. Everything is quaint and odd in this land...

- A Little Dutch Book (1900)

The story above is the beginning of an old American children's book. The world has changed drastically since its publication more than one hundred and twenty years ago, but the picture of the Netherlands as described then still prevails in the contemporary world and in Dutch national identity – with the addition of a major component: the waterworks (Ensel 2019, 19-20), an event that happened after *A Little Dutch Book* was written. The construction of the Wieringerpolder was part of the Zuiderzee-Works, one of the most significant infrastructure projects of pre-war Netherland, designed to improve flood protection and create additional agricultural land (Wieringermeer 2021). It was a development deemed so complex and impressive that the American Society of Civil Engineers declared it as among the seven wonders of the modern world (Ibid). The actual enclosure of the Zuiderzee was a ritualised moment that, according to contemporaries, marked the end of an era and the start of a new future (Ensel 2019, 3-4). The origin story of the Wieringermeer has a far greater meaning than just that of reclaiming land. Before entering the domain of the current development situation in Wieringermeer, the first that will be discussed is how the Wieringermeer history has formed the cultural lens through which the Wieringers perceive the recent alterations in the area.

The battle against the water not only shaped the area but its inhabitants' identity and that of the Dutch nation. The image of the Dutchman as the builder of dikes and polders is omnipresent and often turns up in public speeches: "Like a Baron Munchausen, Holland sucked itself out of the sea with its own pumps, I am proud of that [...]" (De Swaan 2004 in Kešić and Duyvendak 2016, 281-290). King Willem Alexander¹⁰, then Prince, stated that "Water is of great beauty, a primary necessity of life, it's health, environment, transport, it's a fight against water, and it's a primordial Dutch feature [*het is een oer-Hollands iets*]" (Peeters 2013). The fervour is perhaps best summed up with the popular saying, "God created the world, but the Dutch created the Netherlands". Indeed, the construction of Wieringermeer was an act of

¹⁰ The king of the Netherlands and thus a symbol of and for the nation itself.

“nation-building” that not only relates to re-imagining, re-negotiating, and re-inventing the meaning of a “modern” and “traditional” Dutch nation, but also of the modern and traditional people of the Netherlands (Ensel 2019, 2). It is an example of the changes to the land and the perception of it influencing the perception of the identity of the people associated with it. The history of Wieringermeer binds nature and culture into one narrative that influences both Dutch and local contemporary culture. Changing a “wild” and “untamed” land into a place fit for human use (for example, food production) is referred to in the Netherlands as *bringing into culture* [*in cultuur brengen*].

The Wieringermeer is a polder area¹¹ and part of the Municipality Hollands Kroon, located in the northern part of the Netherlands. Nowadays, the Wieringermeer inhabits around 12.500 residents with only sixty-four residents per square kilometre, making it one of the least densely populated areas in the Netherlands (CBS 2019). The Wieringermeer area is sparsely populated because of the extremely strict state-regulated populating policy implemented after its construction in 1934 (Wieringermeer 2021). The government reasoned that housing many working-class people close to each other would result in undesirable activities and thought it essential that the villages remained small (Ibid). The area has four main villages: Wieringerwerf, Middenmeer, Slootdorp, Kreileroord, and many solitary farms.

The partnership ‘Windkracht Wieringermeer’ includes three actors. The first is the ‘Windcollectief Wieringermeer’ (WCW), a collective that represents thirty-four owners of solitary wind turbines. The second is the EnergieTransitie part of TNO, an independent organisation in the Netherlands for applied scientific research. The third, Vattenfall, is a Swedish energy company that owns the Wieringermeer Windfarm (ReportWindparkWieringermeer 2019). While many sources emphasise the efforts taken to include other stakeholders such as local companies and residents (ReportWindparkWieringermeer 2019; HollandsKroon 2019; Vattenfall 2019), it astounds me that these stakeholders are not represented in the partnership itself. For my research, I focus on the energy company Vattenfall, as it is the owner of the windfarm located within my research site.

¹¹ According of the Cambridge Dictionary: a polder is an area of low land that was once part of the sea but has been separated from it through draining (originally windmills but later pumps) and the construction of dykes (a system of ‘earth’ walls and channels to prevent the land from flooding). In the Netherlands, millions of people live in drained polders below sea level.

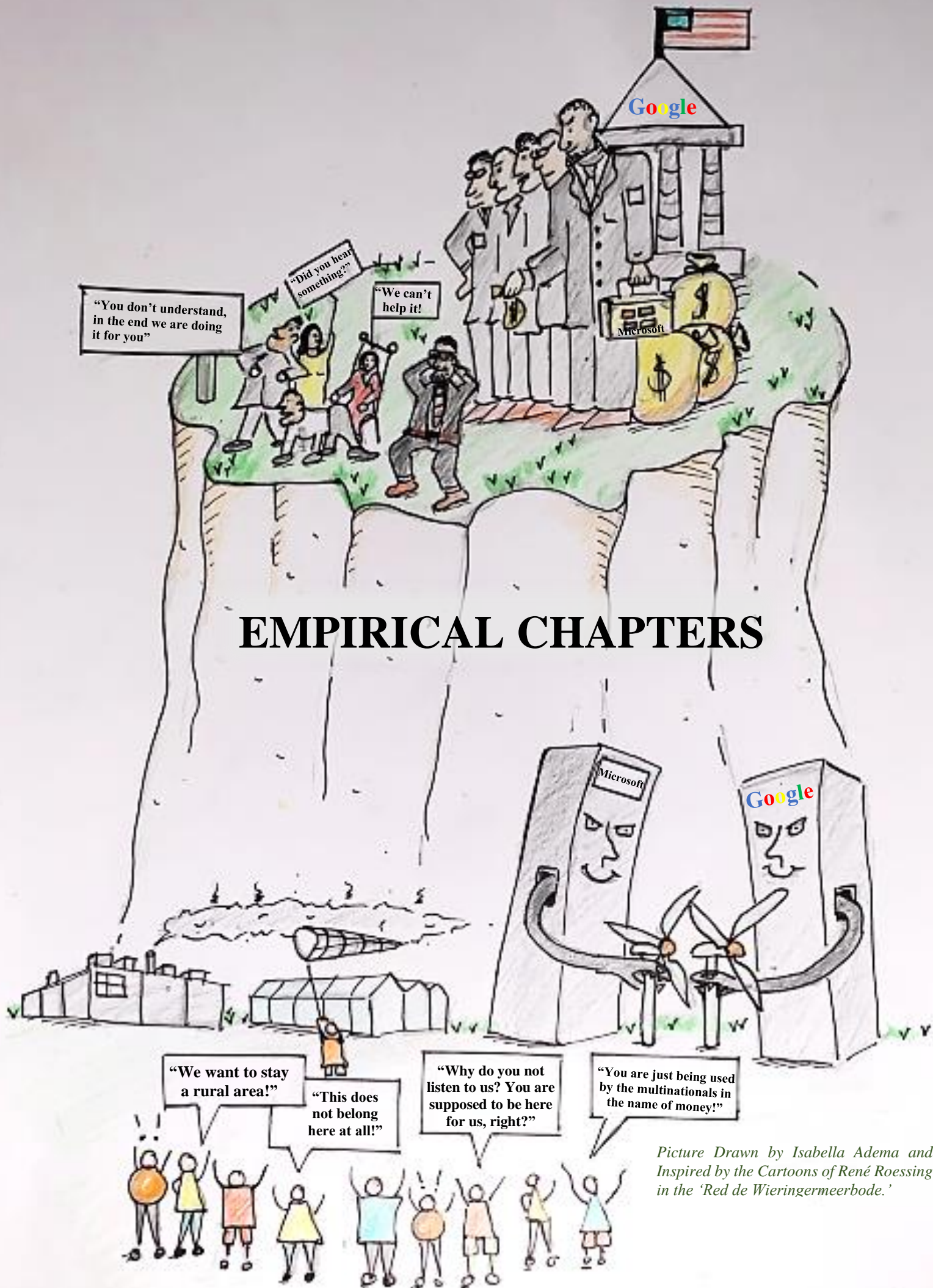
The Swedish energy company Vattenfall promote themselves as a sustainable company. The company's slogans include, *fossil-free living within one generation*, and *transforming life through innovation*, they also put children and nature vistas in their pictures and advertising commercials. Indeed, my first impression was that of a modern, sustainable company with the sole purpose of making the world a better place. Taking a closer look at their annual report (Vattenfall 2019) made me realise that they were only generating 35 per cent of their energy from renewable sources. Instead of being the sustainable company what they try to make people believe, they remain “in transition” and not even close to producing 100 per cent of their energy from renewable sources. In the Netherlands, they closed their last coal-fired power plant in 2019, reducing annual carbon emissions by more than 2 million tonnes. Vattenfall further announced that they would begin building an additional windfarm in the Netherlands at Nij Hiddum-Hou, located in the province Friesland (ibid).

Vattenfall received more bad press at the start of construction on their biomass plant in Diemen, just south of Amsterdam. It will be the largest biomass plant in the Netherlands when completed (Klimaatgek 2020). This is a particularly enlightening example of how Vattenfall distort the reality of their business model by claiming to be “green” while simultaneously contributing to the problem they profess to be helping to eliminate. Proponents of biomass promote it as green energy because it burns biowaste, sawmill residue, and forest overgrowth – materials that have relatively no value. However, research shows that it emits more carbon waste than coal-fired energy and causes the large-scale destruction of forests. The biomass plant is an example of Vattenfall as a business that renews extractive processes and as a model of green capitalism at work, as explained in Chapter 1.2. While it will remain contested for the foreseeable future about whether Vattenfall is serious about becoming 100% renewable, it is a fact that they are the largest emitter of CO₂ by a wide margin. Tata Steel, the next largest emitter, produces half that of Vattenfall (Klimaatgek 2020). The bad press has not been good for Vattenfall's corporate image with vicious tweets, including “#vattenfall is cancer of the world”, and Dutch activists changing their slogan from “fossil-fuel free in one generation” to “tree-free in one generation”.

The building of The Wieringermeer Windfarm was a thirteen-year project from which the final building stage coped with the additional complexity of the Covid-19 pandemic (Planviewer 2020). The Wieringermeer area was already familiar with the concept of windmills as there were already 91 turbines in the area (Ibid). The project needed to disassemble the obsolete ones before constructing the new, and much bigger, models. The park stretches over 300 square kilometres on which 93 or 99 windmills are situated, depending on the source

(Hollands Kroon 2020; Vattenfall 2020a; 2020b; Heijmans 2018). Vattenfall owns 82 turbines, of which 78 are placed on agricultural land and 4 in the Robbenoordbos Forest, a protected nature area. The infrastructure needed for the construction included 1000 kilometres of cables, 82 platforms for the building installations, and 25 kilometres of roads in the park. The constructors employed by Vattenfall were a combined HPV: Heijmans, Gebroeders Pol, and Van Voskuilen (Heijmans 2018).

Vattenfall started the project by speaking with many actors, including the inhabitants of the region. Vattenfall explained a scenario to the residents in which the old windmills would be replaced by new models that blended with the landscape and would provide renewable energy for 370.000 houses, including the Wieringermeer. Along the way, it became clear that the renewable energy generated would not be sold to the Dutch energy grid. Microsoft bought all the green energy for one of its datacentres that is currently in construction close to the location of the windmills (Ekker 2020). The people from Wieringermeer felt betrayed and protested against these broken promises but none of the actors perceived themselves to be responsible (Lubach 2020). Vattenfall claimed that they only generate renewable energy and that it was the responsibility of the state to say who could buy it and under which conditions (Ekker 2020). The state responded by saying that the economy is a free market, and they could not intervene, shifting responsibility to regional policymakers because they are responsible for special planning (ibid). The regional governments also said that they do not have any real influence in this matter (ibid). Arjan Lubach, a popular Dutch television show host, satirically stated that the Netherlands is a tax heaven [*belastingparadijs*] for multinationals and that the state wants to attract these companies to boost their own economic structures and influence (Lubach 2020). There is evidence (e.g. Ekker 2020; Wieringermeer 2021) that the inhabitants of the Wieringermeer perceived green energy and the proposed changes to their area as neutral or positive until the announcement that Microsoft would buy the energy.



"You don't understand, in the end we are doing it for you"

"Did you hear something?"

"We can't help it!"

EMPIRICAL CHAPTERS

"We want to stay a rural area!"

"This does not belong here at all!"

"Why do you not listen to us? You are supposed to be here for us, right?"

"You are just being used by the multinationals in the name of money!"

Picture Drawn by Isabella Adema and Inspired by the Cartoons of René Roessing in the 'Red de Wieringermeerbode.'

Chapter 3 | Wieringers' Place Identity under Threat

The following chapter brings several elements of change and disruption to residents' place identity under discussion by illustrating the lived experience of the Wieringermeer residents with the detrimental changes to the local environment that windfarm development has had upon the area. In particular the social-environmental impacts resulting from changes to land use and the impacts upon local society. The inevitable result of wind turbine development on a large scale is that large multinationals interested in securing renewable energy to power their datacentres follow the wind turbine companies and add to the environmental and cultural impacts. Renewable energy development in the Wieringermeer has intensified, and future development will only accelerate the deterioration of the region's cultural identity and the health and well-being of the community. Every resident interviewed for this study expressed concern that the current developments are eroding the agricultural character of the Wieringermeer, a fear stated explicitly to me by Daan, a member of the working group 'Red de Wieringermeer'. He wants the Wieringermeer "to stay a rural area ... where agriculture, nature, and open space provide its quality." Although Daan did not want to be "abused by multinationals", he said that his concerns were "not just about wind turbines" but the fear that "the Wieringermeerpolder is now in danger of becoming some kind of industrial area". Firstly, I will demonstrate that the current alterations to the physical environment and their impacts upon health are in contestation with the residents' place identity and perceived as a threat to the agricultural character of the Wieringerpolder. Secondly, I will explain that the current developments affect the social-cultural identity of the local population.

§ 3.1 | Social-Environmental Impacts

Breathe-in, breathe-out, breathe-in, breathe-out. It is only a few minutes past 11.00 on a cloudy Sunday morning in March, as I feel the fresh after rain air filling my lungs and the wind playing with my hair. But it is not the wind that sings to me today: the woosh woosh woosh and brmm brmm brmm of the wind turbines softly accompanies me during my walk in the Robbenoordbos forest, not to dominant but always there. There it is! The turbine making the sounds becomes larger as I bridge the distance. The white tower rises from the earth, reaching so far into the sky that I have to bend my head back as far as possible to see the top. The turbine is surrounded by relatively young trees but not by a fence thus I slowly walk towards the stairs leading to the entrance higher up and sit down. It is hard to imagine that this area was part of the sea bottom less than a hundred years ago. The Wieringermeer was regained from the sea to supply the need for agricultural lands but the area of the Robbenoordbos forest was unsuitable for food production through the salt groundwaters. While originally destined to produce woods it nowadays holds a recreational function instead¹². Woosh woosh woosh brmm brmm brmm. Shall I walk to the door of the turbine? No, wait, there might be cameras! But still ... Some children run, screaming of joy, around the corner of the trail, disconnecting me from my reward versus risk contemplation, perhaps for the better. They do not seem surprised that a woman is sitting on the stairs before them; they continue to run. With the noise of the children fading, the woosh woosh woosh and brmm brmm brmm of the turbines returns. I feel a yawn coming and decide to walk on; it is too cold to stay seated anyway. After a while, the forest stops, providing me with a first view of the seemly endless polder. Gigantic turbines and their moving blades are everywhere and, I will not lie, they are absolutely mesmerising. Their presence in the landscape is absolute, making the fast agricultural farmlands look small and the tractors insignificant. I am standing there noticing nothing but the sights and sounds of the turbines when it hits me; maybe my observation is not about their presence but the non-presence of everything else.

- Fieldwork: First Visit to Research Area Wieringermeer.

As Casey (1996, 18) indicates, “to live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in.” Indeed, the overwhelming non-presence of other environmental factors that I experienced during my visit to Wieringermeer could only have been comprehended through being in that place. The local residents expressed great concern about this non-presence during our conversations, as the wind turbines, datacentres, and greenhouses erase the agricultural character they hold in high esteem. The relationship between the Wieringers (people) and Wieringermeer (place) is important for individual-, social-, and cultural identity because it provides a profound centre of human existence to which people have deep emotional and

¹² The Robbenoordbos forest was destined to produce woods but after only ten years the trees were completely destroyed during the Second World War by the bombing of the Afsluitdijk (A dike connecting the province Noord-Holland and the province Friesland which are separated by the IJsselmeer.) and the flooding of the area after the dikes were destroyed. Nowadays it is a recreational area (Staatsbosbeheer 2021) and while not part of my research main research objective this place function could help explain place attachments and identities for non-residents as well (Woods et al. 2012, 59-60).

psychological ties and is part of the complex processes through which individuals and groups define themselves (Convery et al. 2012, 1; Peng et al. 2020). In the Wieringermeer, it is the open landscapes, agriculture, and waterworks (Ensel 2019; Peeters 2013) that help form residents' 'place identities.' Those elements that bond the Wieringers with their residential area are explained by Gordon (2010, 760) as place attachments established through positive associated memories, feelings, meanings, and beliefs. This section focusses on the social-environmental impact of the current developments and shows that the Wieringers participating in my research perceive them as a 'threat to their place identity'.¹³ The section that follows demonstrates how these contribute to the dividing of local society.

Place Attachment

The construction of the Wieringermeer in 1934¹⁴ was an act of 'nation-building' that strongly influenced the meaning of 'modern' and 'traditional' Dutch features, including its population (Ensel 2019, 2), hence the process of 'place-making' (Jaffe & De Koning 2016, 21-55). For the Wieringers, the process of 'making-Wieringermeer' holds strong social-cultural attachments because it reflects their ancestor's resourcefulness, persistence, and pioneers' spirit to change the 'wild' and 'untamed' sea bottom in not only a 'home' but also one of the best areas for agricultural production worldwide¹⁵. The Wieringerpolder originated from human induced alterations to the natural world to gain food resources for sustaining the Dutch population¹⁶, and is a so-called "modern-rational-landscape [*modern-rationeel-landschap*]" (Daan). The current human induced alterations to the natural world in the form of turbines, datacentres, and greenhouses have a strong contrasting effect with the agricultural character of Wieringermeer, what Daan explains to be the "traditional rural landscape" of the Netherlands.

Wind turbines, datacentres, and greenhouses are very visible structures in the flat environment of Wieringermeer. They cannot be hidden behind hills or mountains or secreted in

¹³ The research data contains a variety of perspectives and different opinions, but the general opinion is as stated.

¹⁴ The Polder was fully drained in 1934 after which the area was rapidly prepared for human use. During the Second World War the dikes were bombed and the North Sea [*Noord Zee*] flooded the agricultural area. After the WWII ended, the area was re-gained from the sea once again, the buildings restored, the now salted lands were stubbornly transformed into agricultural lands again, and the residents returned to the Wieringerpolder. The origin story of Wieringermeer is clearly a fight against the water, which King Willem Alexander called "a primordial Dutch feature [*het is een oer-Hollands iets*]" (see Chapter 2 Research Context).

¹⁵ This process is referred to as 'bringing into culture' [*in cultuur brengen*], (see Chapter 2 Research Context).

¹⁶ The Netherlands needed more areas for food production after the WOI and thus started the 'Zuiderzeewerken' (see Chapter 2 Research Context).

valleys because the Wieringermeer has none. Consequently, they dominate the landscape, and their appearance was, unsurprisingly, highlighted by the residents as not belonging to their home area. One of my interviewees, Henk, stated this explicitly: “No, this does not belong here at all.” Importantly, he said not simply that he did not like the datacentres but that they “have nothing to do with the Wieringermeer ... this is not Amsterdam! Period ... Here is Wieringermeer, and that is a polder and not the Randstad¹⁷.” His choice of language highlights his emotional attachment to the area, which combined with experiential and affective traces creates his ‘sense-of-place’ (Anderson 2015, 53-56) for the current developments in Wieringermeer. Henk his strong attachment to Wieringermeer became apprehend through his perception of the current developments as being in contestation with the agricultural identity of the polder. ‘Change’ is a central aspect of the renewable energy transition and when induced, as most studies on place and identity consent¹⁸, it affects the way inhabitants sense their place and consequentially visualizes the bonds between the person and the place. Just as “the fish don’t talk about the water” (Cresswell in Sharp et al. 2000, 263) the environmental context of Wieringermeer used to be normal to the Wieringers and thus impossible to notice until the moment alterations were induced.

Proponents of wind turbine development in the Wieringermeer argue that the addition of wind turbines to the landscape is a natural part of a modern-rational-landscape in the same way that turbines added to new landscapes are considered “an additional beacon of modern civilisation¹⁹” (Boussauw 2001). This argument is refuted by residents of the Wieringermeer, although some admit that explaining the difference is problematic. Daan concedes that it is “a modern rational landscape” and even goes so far as to call it “brand new” due to it being “a reclamation from the last century”. Daan his argument with the local proponents of development who say that modern architecture fits with a modern rational landscape is that “the function of the landscape, the destination, is agriculture”. Moreover, he calls the space “impressive, those huge straight long roads, those trees ... huge fields with sugar beets and potatoes ...”. It is clear that Daan is thinking about the changes to the Wieringermeer as being

¹⁷ According to the Oxford Dictionary ‘Randstad’ means “a *conurbation* in the north-west of the Netherlands that stretches in a horseshoe shape from Dordrecht and Rotterdam round to Utrecht and Amersfoort via The Hague, Leiden, Haarlem, and Amsterdam. The majority of the people of the Netherlands live in this area.” And ‘conurbation’ means “a city area containing a large number of people, formed by various towns growing and joining together”.

¹⁸ Chapter 1.1 demonstrates place and identity studies from an anthropological perspective.

¹⁹ Sustainable developments are most often considered as such ‘beacons of modern civilization’. Chapter 4 Contested Development elaborates on contradictions and fault lines concerning the notion ‘development’ in the renewable energy transition.

more than industrial additions to the landscape that may or may not fit or look pleasant or unpleasant. Just as the informants from the ethnographic studies on windfarm developments from Howe (2014) and Dunlap (2017) in Mexico and that of Argenti and Knight (2015) in Greece, the Wieringers also talk in terms of place function and what that function means to the identity of the community. Both Henk and Daan extensively talked about this during the interviews but the later additionally highlighted that he wants “the people, the population of the Netherlands ... to experience the wide-open space and agricultural environment” because the rural identity of the Wieringerpolder is national as well as local. Thus, the Wieringermeer is a modern-rational-landscape with the local dedication to agricultural production and valued by its organized wide-open landscape. Hence, while the wind turbines, datacentres, and greenhouses relate to the modern character of the Wieringermeer they do not comply to the indicators of wide-open space and the production of agricultural products and thus generally perceived to not belong.

Animal-, Human-, and Environmental Health Risks

There is a great amount of legislation to ensure that wind turbines are installed in Wieringermeer with respect to the potential environmental impacts (see RaportWindparkWieringermeer 2019; Planviewer 2020). Locations are determined by environmental conditions and the restrictions imposed by government policies designed to protect against or to reduce (local) environmental impacts²⁰. Despite this all the interviewees mentioned their concern for animal welfare and mainly that of the birds. The Wieringerpolder is directly beneath their flight routes through its geographical location²¹ and popular by birds as it is not very densely populated by humans, has many waters, and not many predators. Unfortunately, the blades of the turbines live up to their name and are a serious threat to the flying creatures. During my conversation with Marie, she was very emotional about the tragic fate of the birds because she “really care[s] for animals” which was “one of the reasons we moved here, to have space for our horses and dogs ... and to enjoy the quiet and the wildlife”. She shared that “while walking my dog on the land of my

²⁰ While ‘The West’ often considers environmental impacts as being reduced drastically there is quite a lot of impact in other parts of the world (e.g., rare materials, transport resources, non-recyclability old turbine blades) (Stover 2011).

²¹ The Wieringermeerpolder is a very flat and open coastal area flanked by the Waddensee in the North, the IJsselmeer to the East, the North Sea [*Noordzee*] to the West, and the European mainland both East and South. Thus, the last place for birds to rest before heading towards the sea and the first place they can rest when heading towards the mainland.

neighbouring farmer ... there was a big bird very very injured but not dead ... but it was too heavy for me to carry thus I asked a hunter nearby [while she does not like hunters] to shoot it.” The turbines do not only result in animal cruelty but also form a threat to the existence of rare bird species. In May '21, the news showed: *Rare Bird Killed by Turbines* “A rare Lammergeier Vulture crashed in a collision with wind turbine in Wieringermeer” by which the writer calls for action “this vulture may be a martyr [*martelaar*, which means tragic example] ... [for] all bird casualties of wind turbines”. According to the article, “Vattenfall claims to be fully engaged in research to prevent collisions with birds,” and did the company state that “nature has been fully taken into account during construction” (NH Nieuws 2021), as also declared by Vattenfall in its 2019 annual report. The news article tried to raise awareness that Vattenfall does not take this problem serious enough. Indeed, company often mentions that “birds are smarter than we think” and “99 percent is perfectly capable to navigate around the turbines” (Vattenfall 2020c). But what about the lives of the one percent where the Lammergeier Vulture and Marie her bird fell victim to? Every person I interviewed noted to have seen bird casualties themselves and thought it outrageous. It seems that the company is mainly working on a solution to comply with the local concerns to prevent bad media attention.

Marie further mentioned being afraid of “radiation” and after some investigation into the subject, I found that there is the recent suspicion that turbines cause cancer and that studies on this topic are starting (Dunlap 2017). There were no other residents linking the turbines to radiation. Indeed, the situation regarding the protection of the landscape aesthetic is deemed more problematic. While the residents who were interviewed did not directly mention the impact upon their physical health, studies have shown that there are health concerns raised by studies. In a study of windfarms in Mexico, Dunlap (2017) recorded the ill effects of noise and vibrations coming from the wind turbines and a variety of symptoms, including headaches, dizziness, digestive problems, vomiting, nose bleeds, exhaustion, and insomnia. Many reported “extreme irritation from the noise, flicker and the wind tower airplane hazard lights, which mostly resulted in exhaustion, insomnia, hypertension and headaches”. Alarmingly, Vattenfall, in their 2019 annual report on sustainability, does not mention the impact on the health of the population living in close proximity to wind turbines. However, they do mention more than 40 times that health and safety is a priority of the company. Vattenfall concedes that “the costs [they] incur – e.g., impacts on people’s health – can be difficult to quantify”, so they “quantify the cost of an employee or contractor involved in an accident” (Vattenfall 2019, 18). This, perhaps, says much about their attitude towards health. Aside from the physical health concerns,

there is an indication that there are implications for the mental health of residents living in close proximity to the turbines, but this is not confirmed by my interviewees.

Endangered Landscape Aesthetics

“Instead of a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, is there in Wieringermeer a”

“At the end of the rainbow is here always such a f*ucking wind turbine”

- Residents of Wieringermeer²²

What ‘protecting the landscape aesthetic’ exactly means is difficult to grasp, principally because it is mostly subjective. It is certain that wind turbines have a strong impact on the perception of the landscape, and such an influence is not easily objectifiable because it has to do with individual perception. Daan wants “the Wieringermeer to remain a modern rational agricultural area as it used to be . . . because I think the Netherlands should maintain the distinction between rural and urban areas.” Daan has strong opinions about what ‘belongs’ and where it should go. The projects “that come here in Wieringermeer belong to the industrial estates in the Randstad.” There was wholeheartedly agreed upon by my informants that: The Randstad has industry, and that is the place to put industry, the open lands are for agriculture.

Studies have shown that landscapes influence the impact of wind turbine installations and how they are perceived. For example, the installation of a wind turbine in an open landscape has been argued to more negatively impact the open character of the land than areas which are already industrialized (Boussauw 2001). The irony is that the topography of the Wieringermeer makes it ideal for wind turbines but also makes it impossible to hide them. Marie, thought that the lights from the wind turbines were “everywhere – that can’t be good”. Peter said that the lights seen from his parents’ house looked “like a Christmas tree. That’s not a good view at all.” Turbines are regarded by my interviewees as non-integrable objects in their landscape. The preference is that wind turbines should be located in places where there is already a significantly industrialised landscape, such as industrial zones and ports where the integration of turbines can more easily blend into the existing landscape.

Landscape studies show that, despite their considerable height, wind turbines fade into the landscape from six kilometres and at close range visibility can be reduced by the screen

²² Derived from the Facebook page ‘Wieringermeer onze Polder’ [Wieringermeer *our* Polder].

effect. It is Dutch policy that wind turbines should be constructed along ‘lines’²³ in the landscape (Planview 2020) and was required for Vattenfall as well. Nonetheless, all Wieringers are residential within at least 1500 meters from one turbine and hold no significant advantage of this implementation. Blending turbines into the open polder landscape of the Wieringermeer might well be impossible all together, “who drives from the Afsluitdijk, with a lamppost every 25 meters, into the Wieringermeer, gets the feeling to be an ant in a field of gras between the countless wind turbines” (Engeringh 2020). The problem is that open landscapes, like the Wieringermeer, are often preferred because they are more profitable – here is the dilemma and the irony of the situation: open landscapes provide good profits for wind turbine companies but make the most significant negative impact upon rural landscapes. This paradox reflects the work on ‘green capitalism’ by Mitchell (2009; 2011) and that of Kirsch (2009) on ‘oxymoronic terms’ that both contribute to the continuation of ‘extractive economies’ and structures of ‘energopower’ (Boyer 2011; 2014) in the renewable energy transition, this is demonstrated in Chapter 4. Few studies (e.g., Boussau 2001) have analysed viewing patterns of wind turbines or changes to viewing patterns caused by the location of wind turbines, and it is imperative that policymakers adequately address these impacts during the decision-making process. Most studies focus on the technical and economic aspects of wind turbines rather than the impact that a turbine can have on the landscape quality and its liveability. As anyone who has ever gazed up at wind turbines or driven past and wondered what it would be like to live in the vicinity of them, and this is a prime concern of residents in the Wieringermeer.

Change to a place can be perceived as disruptive and a threat. Note that disruption not necessitate an actual physical change as it can be the result from psychological anxiety or sense of threat at possible outcomes or future changes (Devine-Wright 2009, 426-431). The Wieringers complains reflected their opinion that anyone walking near the turbines is certain to feel affected by both the omnipresent sound and movement that seems out of place. Change has a physical impact and a social one as well, especially on social networks (Moscovici 2001). The following section therefore demonstrates how the alterations in Wieringermeer are affecting the social cohesion of the residents and area.

²³ The Dutch rural landscape exists of long straight fields separated from each other through water trenches and roads and housings often follow the same form of organizing. Thus, constructing turbines in long lines alongside these existing ‘natural’ lines is considered as less disruptive for the eye.

§ 3.2 | Dividing Society

“Microsoft and Google are multinationals with, of course, huge profits, billions and billions. They have quite a few companies up and running here already and they are already processing and storing data and such ... What the [multinationals] do, all those local associations and foundations that are here, they all get a nice amount of pocket money [*zak geld*]²⁴ every now and then ... it says in the newspaper ... the theatre or museum received ten thousand euros from Microsoft and Google ... and I mean, they do need it and deserve it but ... this also creates a dichotomy between not only the foreign employees and the local population, but also a dichotomy in the local population as some say ‘look, we get money and are doing very well’ and people who say ‘we have sold our souls to the devil’. So here you get a dividend between [native] local society, of people who like it and people who don’t. This is very interesting actually.”

- Daan, Member of the Workgroup ‘Red de Wieringermeer’

Perhaps the saddest effects of the renewable energy transition are the social divisions and the cultural ‘genocide’²⁵ that often follow the implementation of new developments (Dunlap 2021). For the Wieringers, the social changes brought by the installation of wind turbines and their ancillary infrastructure are at once a potential positive outcome (for the local economy) and a perceived negative one (contributing to demographic change). Many residents perceived that the promised benefits²⁶ to the community were realised outside of the local area or that the new jobs were low-paying, marginal, and mostly taken up by guest workers. As with many new industries moving into new areas, demographic change often follows. Residents had a significant concern about changes to the society, and these concerns ranged from antipathy towards changes of the demographic to concern about the rights of the guest workers. As Anderson (2015, 3) explains, places are “saturated with cultural meanings” and words like “our home, our “backyard”, our “area” (ibid, 51) resonate and fortify our inclusion. Conversely, the current developments and influx of guest workers are not in compliance with Wieringer culture and have the affect that the Wieringers experience the alterations as ‘out of place’, but also hold the unease of being ‘displaced’ themselves. It should also be stated that some residents believed that the negative social aspects brought by windfarms were being addressed, and the integration of guest workers into the local community was underway—however, the negative perceptions of the social outcomes far outweighed any perceived benefits. A further social impact was the

²⁴ Pocket money, or *zak geld*, in this context refers to a humiliating small amount of bribe money. *Zak geld* is the small sum of money parents give their children in the Netherlands to, for example, buy some candy or a toy.

²⁵ Cultural genocide will be elaborated on in Chapter 4.2. It holds strong connections to Chapter 3.2 Dividing Society.

²⁶ Chapter 4.1 elaborates on ‘broken promises’ from an ‘energopower’ line of reference.

division caused by a perceived unequal spread of compensation to local farmers. Moreover, the reality of the renewable energy transition in the Wieringermeer is that not all citizens are opposed to the windfarm, greenhouses, and datacentres and there is an obvious problem when developments are contested by other locals seeking to maintain their lifestyles. Many locals actively promote renewable energy developments for the economic and social benefits they purport to bring. Landowners seeking a big pay day, businesses seeking financial windfalls, and politicians for a myriad of reasons often join forces with developers to ensure that permissions for development are granted. Just as Dunlap explains for his study on Oaxaca, Mexico (2017, 215), this “has led to strife and divisions within villages and families that further complicate the micro-politics of the conflict”. The current developments led (and still) to disputes and discord at best, annihilation, and cultural decline at worst.

Guest Workers

Most of the negative perceptions of the Wieringers centred on the jobs created by the windfarms and the resulting changes to the social fabric of the community. The influx of industry brought some jobs but, as Henk said, “there is no Dutchman who works there, only a few students, but for the rest they are only foreigners, those seasonal workers ...” The perception was that the migrant workers who came to the area for work could precipitate the area becoming “a kind of double society,” and a “culture gap ... because it is mainly Polish, Czech, Bulgarian people who ... do not live between us, but who live in a kind of camp,” as Daan described. The separation of workers from the local population in Wieringermeer shows similarities with the research from the anthropologist Ferguson (2005) on the oil economy of African countries. He found that such fossil-companies mainly existed in ‘private enclaves’ separate from the local population, state infrastructures, and provided little or no economic benefit to the wider society. The separation between the Wieringers and the employees of the multinationals is not to the same extent as Ferguson his study in Africa, but there are parallels between his findings on the fossil economy and the renewable economy in Wieringermeer, including dubious housing arrangements for guest workers “for optimising profits, it is the economy” (Henk).

Eva said that the living arrangements of the workers were in such a poor condition that they were “just too bad for words [*te slecht voor woorden*]”, an opinion all my participants shared. They explained the living arrangements being “bad tents during the winter on the land of a farmer” (Daan); “barns without heating” (Marie); “stuffed together in small housings”

(Henk). While this situation seems in the past, Henk expounded that the migrant workers were forced into paying too much rent for the ‘normal’ housings they are residential now. The negative perceptions were not focused solely on a potential deterioration of living standards that might cause tension. Residents were often critical of the government, the employment company, and the greenhouse companies on Agriport for the treatment of workers. Peter thought that the Polish employees should also be well taken care of because “the Dutch often don't want the job, can't, or whatever. But then I think you bring those people in so please take good care of them too. They're people too!”

Most residents found it impossible to make any positive remarks about the changes to their community. One resident, Henk, did agree that changes to the working conditions had improved and that he could see a future benefit to the local community as these workers integrated into the community. Henk acknowledged initial problems with the guest workers but sees improvement: “Now it starts to get better and now you notice that the people who have been here for a long time ... are now starting to get permanent contracts ...” When residents talked negatively about the arrival of migrant non-Dutch workers, it was natural to think that prejudicial attitudes might have been surfacing. The truth is that many residents resist outsiders coming to their area without engaging with it other than for work. The permanent workers “have children and they go to school here in the village and that is good for the village” (Henk). Henk saw an obvious difference in workers who “live here in the village ... because they really want to integrate into the village” and workers who “have the space every weekend [for themselves] and have all the fun in the world [*elk weekend de plek voor hunzelf hebben en de tijd van hun leven hebben*]” It appears that the problem of guestworkers’ housing is being solved, but there remains the problem of integration into the community. Workers who gain contracts *are* being integrated into the community after moving into the villages, starting families, and taking up language programs.

The perception among many residents is that ‘permanent’ workers benefit the community because they stem the outward flow from the villages caused by young people leaving to attend college or university or to gain more desirable jobs. However, the problem remains that most workers stay only for the season and do not integrate into the community. As with any migrant workforce, it takes time for social integration, and the continual influx and departure of seasonal workers will only continue to slow the process. Processes of segregation or ‘dividing society’ are present in the Wieringermeer through the separation of migrant

workers in enclaves (natives versus multinationals) but also by the uneven distribution of benefits in local society (natives versus natives), as will be explained in the following chapter.

Weakening of Social Cohesion

The main perceived negative outcome after the issue of seasonal workers was the disharmony and perceived reduction in social interactions between residents. Eva said that “before, we regularly, every year at least, had a BBQ together and most people were there ... But this hasn't been the case for a number of years ... you occasionally keep in touch with each other about how things are going and stuff, has just become a lot less.” It was clear that the issue of compensation paid out to some residents and not others caused friction in the community. Just as the fossil-companies in Africa from Ferguson (2005) his study Vattenfall gets rich largely at the expense of the indigenous populations. Paradoxically, Vattenfall communicates and compensates the local population for living with the giant turbines, but this results in more problems for local society than the complete exclusion of Ferguson his research.

The main reason that the social cohesion among residents' declines is the division caused by the perceived unequal spread of compensations determined by the distance between house and turbine, and the excessive amount of money paid for the solitary turbines previously owned by local farmers. Many Wieringers were concerned that some residents “sold-up”, took their large payments and left the area. Meanwhile, those that received little, or nothing remained behind and had to endure the consequences of the new industry. For those that took the money and remained, there was some resentment, not necessarily at the farmers who took the money but at the injustice of the outcome. Henk talked about the approximately thirty farmers who “got two, two and a half million” and drove “big Porsches” while they were “bursting with money [*barsten van het geld*]”, as farmers in different circumstances have to “bite an apple [*op een appeltje bijten*]” because “he has nothing”. That the farmers gained this profitable opportunity is not the problem but rather that the consequences are “for their neighbors” (Marie). The residents themselves are unevenly compensated for the inconvenience of living with turbines, as Henk explains, “There is a fonds ... but they exclude the people who live in the villages ... that there is a distant boundary, fine, there has to be a boundary somewhere, but if you live eight hundred meters [from the turbine] and you live in a village you get nothing but the farm next door is a thousand meters from the turbine and then you get something, that is not right.” In consequence, discontent among the residents arises from their awareness that their

fellow Wieringers might receive more compensations or opportunities. Moreover, the reality of the renewable energy transition in the Wieringermeer is that not all citizens are opposed to the windfarm, greenhouses, and datacentres and there is an obvious problem when developments are contested by other locals seeking to maintain their lifestyles, further complicating the contestations in the local politics.

While there is a lot of debate about wind energy developments, all residents perceive the economic development of the Agriport as a negative impact on the community. Both the datacentres and greenhouses have a negative impact on the landscape, and the economic benefits in terms of employment are almost negligible. Also, Peter noticed the tensions arising from this separation and expressed his anger towards the farmers who sold their lands to the companies and then moved out of the area. When Kramer (2017) said that “we could make [the] Paris [agreement]”, he then asked, “but who receives the benefits and who receives the burdens?” It would be nice to think that these are evenly distributed but it is certain that multinationals and a small sum of other actors will find a way to take the biggest slice of the pie. As for the burdens, they will inevitably fall upon those who are least able to shoulder them. The ramp-up of the renewable energy transition, a direct result of “Paris”, threatens to become a modern colonisation that has the potential to induce a cultural genocide, as did most colonisations of the past.

A Storm of Voices²⁷

“We have to write to the council of the municipality. They let this happen. They were all afraid for the big mouth of Meskers!!!!”

“What a negative situation. With money you can make a lot [wrongs/information] disappear.”

“Hebzucht en deksel op je kop”

“Maybe we should make the councilmembers follow this course [on democracy], might help.”

“Zal wel niet gaan gebeuren. Die vinden zichzelf al allemachtig goed.”

“Not only the Wieringermeer is never dark anymore.... The surrounding villages neither... truly horrible”

“Horrible, I thought that the greenhouses were only allowed if they stayed dark at night?”

“Yes that was the agreement!”

“Apparently they are allowed to change agreements”

“Yes, it is always more more more”

“Money Money Money that is what they want!”

“There they are again, RATTENfall²⁸ with their ‘advertisement’. I rather want a clean environment by providing us with the energy that is generated instead of it going to the multinationals. Therefore, for me NO RATTENfall!!!!!!!!”

“Stay away from the Rattenfall, very unsustainable”

“Don’t sell your soul to the devil”

“Never with Vattenfall, Subsidy eaters, dubious trade in CO2 rights, building sickening²⁹ wind turbines, and then cutting down forests for the bio-industry?”

“VATTENFALL..... NEVER IN MY LIFE! [*Nooit in mijn leven*]”

“Groene stroom ja. Maar ten koste van de natuur in zijn geheel. Dus zo ‘groen’ is het dus allemaal niet.”

“Sustainable? Biggest polluter ever. OMG”

“Shame on you! What a horrible society, polluting all of our lands and getting paid for it by the lying politics/dictators [*Leugenkartel*]”

²⁷ The quotes on this page are derived from various Facebook pages. For example: *Wieringermeer onze-Polder; Vattenfall Nederland; Wieringen die Wieringers Maakten...* These statements are taken into account but not considered for the analysis because sources such as Facebook are known to mainly produce polarized and negative opinions. They quotes placed here are reflected (in a more nuanced way) in the collected interview data.

²⁸ Vattenfall is here referred to in Dutch as Rattenfall. It translates into ‘Rats’ and ‘Trap’ and contains the double meaning that the company is a disease bringing plague (being rats) that is very untrustworthy (laying traps).

²⁹ Directly translated into ‘ziekmakende’ but means an absolute horror.

Chapter 4 | Contested Renewable Development

The Wieringermeer was created by government policy, with government control of the planning, reclamation, and construction of the area, including the development of farms and the selection of farmers, all with the intent of providing a benefit to the nation. However, the immediate benefits to the Wieringermeer from wind energy projects are marginal at best, and the social and cultural impact is of great concern to most residents. I substantiate that renewable energy development is locally perceived as a required climate mitigation and therefore could have been accepted as a ‘necessary burden’ as not for the undemocratic procedures and following contested developments³⁰. Responses from residents reveal that the developments, including the windfarm, greenhouses, and the datacentres are only the tangible, visible result of the development process that has caused so much contention in the community. The feeling among the residents goes much deeper than the obvious dislike for the unattractive buildings that have invaded their landscape. A part of the problem is the fragmentation of the decision-making process as the decisions that shape their lives are being made further and further away from the specific locales where they live. As demonstrated in chapter 3, to some the current developments offer job opportunities or financial benefits but for most it means a threat to place identity, risk to health, and dividing of local society. But what all Wieringers have in common, as this chapter will show, is a loss of political autonomy and the erasure of lived experiences, or ‘cultural genocide’.

³⁰ Chapter 4 elaborates on the politics of energy and development.

§ 4.1 | Energopower

“Hollands Kroon must also dare to be a rural municipality because the landscape is built for agriculture and must not want to have an urban allure.”

“The fact that datacentres are now being built is a mistake in the process, first wanting to stop building datacentres, and then just keep going.”

“But is that the case, administratively? Is it really not right what they are doing?”

“Well, let me explain to you the picture of the fact that they were first looking for an expansion area for Agriport. There has been a smaller search area and large opposition from the population. Then she stopped the plan. So politically, you have stopped a procedure. Then it cannot be the case that the next plan a few months later is again an expansion plan for Agriport. This is against decency. Maybe it is legally possible, but you just can't make it to the population and concerned citizens. So, this is what we need to talk about.”

- Conversation between Members Workgroup ‘Red de Wieringermeer’

Unlike conventional forms of energy production are renewables often generated on inhabited lands because of their specific environmental requirements such as wind force and space consumption (Bell & Ashwood 2015). While it is easier to control people’s perceptions of a place than controlling the actual physical world (Foucault 1991, 50-65), the renewable energy developments show in reverse that performing control over the physical world can result in local perceptions of place identity as being in contestation with the arriving developments. Monbiot (2003, back cover) argues that “everything has been globalised except democracy”. The irony is that if one loses rights (democratic or otherwise), one cannot then accept responsibility nor take the blame. Bell and Ashwood (2015) argue that globalisation has caused the destruction of many communities with the migration towards towns that redefined social relations. One of the manifestations of this is a major function of local communities worldwide: mutual assistance. What was once the responsibility of the whole communities – health and well-being, financial assistance in times of hardship, companionship – has now been left to no one, not even the governments, it seems. The Wieringers identity of the Wieringerpolder is that of a modern-rational-landscape that holds its quality in agricultural land-use and wide-open space. This section demonstrates that the place-protective actions prior to the windfarm, greenhouses, and datacentre developments yielded no results for the Wieringers and converted into an overall sense of futility.

Extractive Encounters

‘Extractive encounters’ are “the negotiations and frictions between individuals and groups with different agendas, worldviews, and aims, within the context of [extractive] mining [also renewable] operations, from the early stages of exploration and development to the final phase of closure and aftermath” (Pijpers & Eriksen 2019, 4). There is an underlying theme in all interviews with the Wieringers that resulting problems for the community rest not with the seasonal workers or the multinationals, both of whom come to the community essentially for economic reasons. There was a significant disparity in the level of consultation about the windfarms compared to consultation over the datacentres and some residents felt that they had been coerced – even bribed – by influential multinationals with big cheque books. Powers and responsibilities are dispersed, with the central government managing and mediating while lower government authorities are responsible for planning and energy management. Boyer (2011; 2014) developed the notion of ‘energopower’ to explain that the extractive logic of fossil fuels continues with renewable energy developments. Energopower is the political effort to dominate the economic process of harnessing electricity and fuel in order to maintain control of communities. Consequently, the transition the renewable energy production in Wieringermeer shows that the political effort to confront and destabilize dominant fossil-fuel systems of economic energy power results in authoritarian political tendencies that contribute to ‘greening’ capitalism instead to the intended climate mitigations. Even though accepted that the environment and humans are part of the same system the economy holds a special place outside of this and has a dialectical relationship with conceptions of local- and national identity.

Disjunctures between economy, politics, and culture are apparent in the Wieringermeer in the manner in which the effects of the transition to renewable energy upon culture are often determined by decision-makers who invariably come from the political and economic parts of the triumvirate. A localised shaping of international power dynamics is evident in Wieringermeer in the way “the polder grid, which once represented a democratic ideology based on equal conditions for every farmer ... created a kind of ‘special economic zone’ that is continuously adapted to meet to meet the needs of the companies within the zone” (Kuijpers 2021). The residents were not unaware of this function. Peter said that “there are higher powers, I am talking businesspeople and of course that tends [*neigt*] to Google [...]. What I try to say is there is so much money involved ...”. Despite this awareness, it is perhaps less clear how much the residents understand the significance of energopower, what is not surprisingly through the discursive nature of power and its processes. Of Microsoft and Google, Daan said that “I do not

blame them, they also see a market opportunity and they also give a lot of money and the option to store our data.” This is exactly what is political about the process, it is not just the fact that the renewable energy transition in Wieringermeer signifies and constitutes relations of privilege and social control, but mainly the constant tension between the existing frameworks and the tendency of commodities to breach these (Appadurai 1988, 3-6).

Despite the success of Urgenda³¹, who spoke in behalf of the Dutch population, in forcing their government to reduce emissions actively, none of the renewable energy produced by Vattenfall in Wieringermeer has become part of the national energy network. Instead, it is sold to powerful multinationals such as Microsoft and Google to supplement their locally constructed unsustainable datacentre industry with green energy. The power of these multinationals and corporations is immense and results in locals having less influence over on their sources of power, while this power continues to influence them (Burke & Stephens 2018, 79-88). Daan was cognisant of the big multinational actors that were working behind the scenes. He feared that the Wieringermeer was in danger of becoming “some kind of third world area for the multinationals such as Microsoft and Google. We have the feeling that we let ourselves be used by the big business.” The notion ‘land grabbing’ is useful for the connection between contested land use in Wieringermeer. Coined by Karl Marx, it describes “the appropriation, enclosing and integrating large tracts of land into public and private control” (1867 in Dunlap 2017, 41-42). Local politician Kees explained that the land deals between the Microsoft and the owner of Agriport were already completed before the local politics, they said, even gained knowledge of this happening. Consequently, as multinationals and governments move towards renewable energy policies that directly impact the inhabitants of the areas under development, the locals are often forced into changes to their environment, living conditions, economy, and their identities.

Microsoft and Google strategically employ notions of ‘green’ or ‘renewable’ energy to promote their image of being progressive and contributing to the public good. This notion of ‘green capitalism’ is not only applicable for datacenters but also for the energy company Vattenfall, who owns the Wieringermeer Windfarm. The company recently opened the largest biomass plant in the Netherlands, south of Amsterdam, but research shows that this causes the large-scale destruction of forests and emits more carbon waste than coal-fired energy, which is quite apparent from Vattenfall being the largest emitter of CO₂ by a wide margin with Tata

³¹ The research context elaborates on Urgenda and other involved stakeholders.

Steel, the second largest emitter (Klimaatgek 2020). This is a particularly enlightening example of how Vattenfall distort the reality of their business model by claiming to be “green” while simultaneously contributing to the problem they profess to be helping to eliminate. The bad press has not been good for Vattenfall’s corporate image with vicious tweets, including “#vattenfall is cancer of the world”, and Dutch activists changing their slogan from “fossil-fuel free in one generation” to “tree-free in one generation”. While the 'free market' was supposed to balance itself out and so ensure equality, instead, Eriksen (2014) argues that humans everywhere enter the same playing field they do not participate equally. Social inequality is deeply embedded in the problems caused by globalisation and capitalism. It is both a product and a producer in this picture, and most fundamentally, it shapes our social experiences, and this shapes knowledge (Bell & Ashwood 2015).

The UN Sustainability Goals for 2030 are emblematic of the tension between economic and environmental goals that often seem to run counter. The UN wants to “ensure poverty in all its forms everywhere,” and will presumably fund this task by “promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth”. (2015) (It seems as though repeating the word “sustainable” is part of the solution.) Meeting these dual objectives, and others like them, is always going to be difficult – otherwise, we would already have achieved them. In the Wieringermeer, similar issues arise. All of the residents spoken to for this study support the mitigation of climate change, but some reject the sale of the energy to datacentres. Others do not seem to care much about the visual changes to the landscape caused by the windfarms but admit to living where they cannot be seen. It is difficult not to have sympathy for those who do complain about the visual impact of a wind turbine. The construction of any large structure near your home would be confronting, to say the least, but in a rural environment it would be acute.

Broken Promises

Regarding the local renewable transition in Wieringermeer, the very first promise to be broken was that the generated energy would provide green electricity for around 370.000 houses, including the Wieringerpolder (Ekker 2020). The Wieringers felt betrayed and protested against these broken promises but none of the political and economic stakeholders perceived themselves to be responsible (Lubach 2020). In energy networks there are so many actors that it is easy for one or more to shift the blame to another. Eriksen’s (2018) *Broken Chain of Responsibility* interrogates this ‘chain of blame’, the economy/human/nature divide – a

relatively new phenomenon – impacted how people thought and made it very easy to shift responsibility to someone or something else. The resulting problems Eriksen does not see as being complicated in and of themselves as the real problem is the lack of responsibility and the ‘chain of blame’. Indeed, Vattenfall claimed that they only generate renewable energy and that it was the responsibility of the state to say who could buy it and under which. Meanwhile the state responded that they could not intervene because it is a free-market economy, shifting responsibility and blame to the regional policymakers. While the regional government of Municipality Hollands Kroon decides on spatial planning, they also said that they did not hold any substantial influence in this matter (Ekker 2020). Many residents were upset at the local government’s lack of consultation, but they were dismayed when promises were made and then broken.

One of the first promises made and broken after the implantation of the windfarm, greenhouse, and datacentre developments was for a revised zoning plan to create a “link” between the greenhouse and the datacentre that would reduce the environmental burden on the community through the exchange of energy and residual heat. Both Peter and Daan mentioned the broken promise of the link in their interviews. Peter mentioned, like many others interviewed, that the initial promises of employment were not kept. While the authorities pointed to the jobs that were, indeed, created by the developments, Peter said that then jobs were for “foreigners from all over Europe” during the construction stages, or “ITers” who come from outside the area because “the farm boys here are not ITers”. Eva said that she “sometimes finds it difficult” to deal with the “ambiguity in politics” and categorised the local council simply by saying “the lies reign [*leugens regeren*], you know”. Sam alluded to political double-speak by agreeing that they had created jobs but “didn’t say that last sentence” in my question, which was that the jobs were for guest workers.

It is no idle contention to say that all the major actors who formed part of the structure that controlled the decision-making process in the Wieringermeer windfarm project could not keep a single promise made to the inhabitants of the area. It is an indictment on the project, renewable energy transition and, perhaps, even on the Dutch forms of governance. Like the archetypal broken chain of responsibility, for those who are not savvy enough to understand or skilful enough to negotiate the process and protocols – like most residents in the Wieringermeer – there is a feeling that they are impotent to effect change and often even to be heard.

A Futile Struggle

The current developments in Wieringermeer are highly contested by the inhabitants of the area but they perceived their self-efficacy as nihil, and capability to interact with the political decision-making processes to be futile. ‘Self-efficacy’ is an persons’ perception on own capabilities to exercise influence over events that affect their lives. The beliefs a person holds regarding their power to affect situations strongly influences both the power a person actually has for facing challenges and the choices a person is most likely to make. Peter said that he had not been consulted about the developments at all and had like most residents who were interviewed “read about it in the newspaper” after the decisions were already made and public engagement no longer optional. Peter frenetically explained that the developments “were, of course, enforced” and the turbines build “before the legal permits were given” The lowest possible interaction between developers and the concerned local stakeholders is that of ‘informing’, nonetheless even this low-intensive form of communication proved marginal. The overall situation was perceived by the Wieringers as completely unmanageable without any change to perform their democratic rights at all.

Researchers with a discursive approach to the concept, such as Dixon and Durrheim (2004), pay attention to the important role that language plays in constructing reality. While most interviewees stated to not have received information before the developments the development process happened democratic, but the provided information was often not comprehended because “the residents read it but do not understand the terms or consequences” (Daan) “but you can find the information if you look it up ... [but] ... you do have to know what you are looking for ... this they don’t tell us” (Ellis). This is interesting when thinking about the political implications of communicating meaning and the contestation of these meanings by actors who attempt to promote their own interests (Devine-Wright 2009, 437). Strong place identity beliefs are among the most important drivers of environmental behaviour and place protective action (Faccioli et al. 2020; Devine-Wright 2009) because people with an attachment to a certain place are likely to support the preservation of that place so that its meaning, or place identity, stays the same (Faccioli et al. 2020, 2-3). Marie presented the political situation from the residents’ perception as:

“The politicians do whatever they feel like nowadays. Then when I read in the newspaper or hear on the television that ... residents are against a windfarm and that it is finally put down to the [national] government and they just re-place it [the contradictions] under some law. Then I also think 'but what's the point of those people going up the barricade, you know' ... They just

pretend that they are listening to you and then, yeah, then just nothing more ... Here in Wieringermeer, yes, here, it is simply not doable, and it really has to stop!”

Residents are exploited because they are small actors with little agency in a game played by powerful interests outside their community. Consequently, it is natural that those charged with protecting the local community’s interests – the local government – are apportioned most of the blame. Consistent themes among residents were that they were either not consulted or, when they were, their recommendations or concerns were not taken into account, or they were misled. Even when the processes seemed “very democratic,” as Daan suggested, “everything went very fast because the multinationals have a lot of influence and they use all kinds of special laws”. Daan conceded that “spatial ordering is very complicated but democratic ... [and] ... if you want as citizen you can participate quite well, but most residents do not know how this system works.” Although the processes are democratic in theory this holds no meaning if they are not accessible, or user-friendly, for the Wieringers. This inaccessibility to democratic power is the result of ‘the resource curse’, which refers to the paradox that wealth of natural resources results in “stagnation of social development and poverty; high conflict ... and tendency toward authoritarian regimes” (Reyna et al. 2008). Marie said the authorities “just pretend like they're listening to you and then, yeah, then just nothing more.” It is emblematic of the treatment of the local residents that, for most, the articles in newspapers, ostensibly published to ‘inform’ the community, were often the only source of information about the developments in their community. Perhaps Peter said it most succinctly when asked if the process was fair: “No ... but, yes, what can you do about it?” Henk, part of the sounding board group [*klankbord groep*], went to meetings, and made his voice heard, but “nothing was done”. Peter was also a part of the same group and revealed that, although the group was involved in the preparation phase, “when it became concrete, the sounding board group was disbanded”. Many also feel that they have been swindled by fast-talking, big-spending salesman from the outside the area. Daan referred to Microsoft and Google as being the VOC who was colonising their land and bribing them with small gifts to gain local cooperation for future endeavours.

Although Microsoft and Google put their building plans “on hold” (Ouhajji 2021) after my fieldwork ended in April, they were not “off the table”. When reading this news, I cheered for this small success were my informants from the ‘Red de Wieringermeer’ working group worked so hard for to achieve. Merely one week later, Google announced to cancel further datacentre developments in Wieringermeer (Vegeliën 2021a), and it seemed that the Wieringers were actually going to beat the energopower structures forced upon them and regain their

democratic rights regarding decision-making processes. Unfortunately, energopower repositioned itself a few weeks later was announced that five more datacentres would be constructed (Vegelian 2021b). The Wieringermeer might indeed gain the character as being what Lubach (2020) recalled as “the hard-drive of the world [*hardeschijf van de wereld*].” The enforcement of wind energy and datacentres not only deprived them of their democratic rights, including the power of self-determination, but it also affected their culture.

Residents were not expert negotiators or familiar with the consultation process and felt unable or ill-equipped to contribute to the decision-making process. Residents blame the local government for not protecting their rights or making the process for change both fully transparent and comprehensible to the residents, who are, in effect, the most affected by these developments. From the litany of broken promises to the feelings of futility expressed by them at their lack of agency, both detailed below, the energopower structure is a giant roadblock to any possibility that Wieringers might feel satisfied at the outcomes resulting from the changes brought to their community by the windfarm development. Instead of moving forward together, Bell and Ashwood (2015) predict that people will be increasingly divided by economic and political power, inevitably heightening social tensions and increasing the risk of social breakdown. With more technology, more ideas, products, actors, and the resultant increase in complexity, the chain of responsibility must inevitably break. Alamgir and Banerjee (2018, 272-281) argue the rise in global economics has resulted in significant shifts in relationships between the market, the state, and society and a fragmentation of class, ethnicity, religion, and gender because of the differential treatment of certain populations based on their ability to serve global markets. Failing to see the globalised world from a holistic point of view complicates many issues and underlies the fault lines when trying to solve them. This manifests in the never-ending deferment of responsibility as the blame gets passed down the line. During my fieldwork the Wieringers explained that everything just happened to incomprehensible. After reading the latest news on the developments to come it is safe to follow Eriksen (2018) his clarification on responsibility: “it is so diffuse that no single person or organization has the authority to say: *Enough is enough! Let’s slow down a bit.*”

§ 4.2 | Cultural Genocide

Once upon a time there was a chicken named Microsoft who asked the pig named Hollands Kroon “shall we merge so that we can sell eggs and bacon and earn a lot of money?” The pig liked making a lot of money, so everything became prepared. When the pig came out of the first daze, he found that if he had to deliver bacon it would cost him his head, but there was no turning back. He complained to the chicken, who replied that it was always like this in the market, that one of the two sides was sacrificed in favour of the other.

- Anonym from Facebook

The previous empirical sections showed that there is a fundamental connection between the Wieringermeer and the use of its lands. Whereas land is simply the foundation for the construction of cities, whose urban culture and economy thrive on human ingenuity and industry that may have little direct attachment to the physical ground over which it occurs, historical discourses of rurality explain the land to be at the heart of the rural economy and society (e.g., Woods et al. 2012, 57). The Wieringers constructed the land, live on the land, work the land, tend the land, and thus know their area as fundamentally agricultural. The Wieringermeer did not only form the base of the local economy but also shaped the rural culture, the rural calendar, and contributed to the agricultural and rural character of the Wieringerpolder. As such, despite processes of globalisation, the impact of windfarms, greenhouses, and datacentres on local communities is not confined to changes to the landscape but also include the resultant perceptions Wieringers have of the impact on their culture.

Processes of segregation, ‘dividing society’, are present in the Wieringermeer through the separation of migrant workers in enclaves and by the uneven distribution of benefits in local society which creates tensions. The current developments in Wieringermeer are also processes central to cultural genocide. Important is that while ‘genocide’, in the strict sense of the word, is the “destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves” (Dunlap 2017, 225-230). In a cultural sense, it is the elimination of the traits of a group that form the identity of that group. For indigenous peoples in areas of renewable energy development (e.g., Howe 2014; Argenti & Knight 2015; Dunlap 2021), including my research population in Wieringermeer, there are similar processes and impacts. The ethnographic research on windfarm developments in Mexico (Howe 2014; Dunlap 2017; 2021) and Greece (Argenti & Knight 2015) demonstrate, renewable energy companies and their promoters often expose cultures to death, increase the risk of cultural death by changing the way indigenous people live and changing their landscapes and natural resources

that often have deep cultural meanings, and, in the end, some cultures are faced with death, expulsion, and rejection. “When I say ‘Killing,’ I obviously do not mean simply murder as such,” said French philosopher Michel Foucault (2003, 256). If one were to substitute “culture” for “killing/death” in Foucault’s subsequent remarks, there are confronting similarities in the way that renewable energy companies affect the cultures of the people in the areas they develop. Foucault went on to describe other forms of indirect murder: “... exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on”, ‘political death’ is something most of my participants indirectly pointed out.

My research found strong indications of cultural genocide in Wieringermeer despite that it proved a difficult-to-talk-about topic as such processes happen unnoticed over a long-time span. Furthermore, through the social distancing of the Covid-19 pandemic it was not possible to observe and participate in social and cultural interactions to increase mutual understanding and thereby insights in this topic. Consequently, cultural genocide is underrepresented in my obtained data. I deem it imperative, nonetheless, to bespeak this impact of the current developments as the Wieringers perceive threat to the agricultural character and weakening of social cohesion are clear indications of the erasure of cultural characteristics, hence cultural genocide.

Political ‘Death’

The neglecting of the opinions of Wieringer representatives in local politics subsequently excludes their lived experiences and future perspectives for the area. This can be supplemented with Esteva (1992, 6-7) input that ‘development’ implies advancement to something ‘superior’ but actually robs “peoples of different cultures of the opportunity to define the forms of their social life.” This danger behind the developments in Wieringermeer was explicitly stated by local politician Kees as well; “The college ... of course they think it is wonderful to be able to say, ‘we developed that!’, but they forget what impact this has for the area they develop it in. And also, the fact, what do you leave behind in your legacy for the future of the children!” That policy of the Municipality Hollands Kroon seems unaware that their actions are a form of generalization that affects future diversity in perspectives and insights. Dunlap (2021, 219) explains that this essentialism remains crucial to locate identity boundaries and the foundation of which the term genocide rests. On which he continues that while dancing with the (colonial)

politics of recognition, judicial systems and liberal genocide scholars thus need to create, approve, and judge the authenticity of victim identity (ibid). Local politician Kees explained that “... you are dealing with local politics. With people who have well-intentions and who also want to do something for the municipality” but through inexperience they would be overruled by large and powerful political parties, such as the VVD and CDA, and this “isn’t correct ... because I think that you should provide [them] ... with opportunities to speak without being cut off.” It is modern colonisation with the same economic imperatives. Moreover, Moses (2008, 22) describes colonialism as “embodied by ‘the occupation of societies on terms that robs them of their “historical line of development” and transforms them “according to the needs and interests of the colonial rulers.” While the imperial notion of consolidating power over a colony by establishing political structures (Moses 2008, 23-24) is not endemic today, there remains an unequal exchange that threatens to exacerbate the existing problems. But apparent is that structures of energopower in Wieringermeer imposed seemingly progressive programs that are actually indifferent to the local population and in contestation with their cultural identity. As Dunlap (2017, 218) explains, renewable energy transition continues a “trajectory of enclosure, privatisation, and capital accumulation, consequently renewing the coercive impositions on indigenous territory and their relationship with the land.”

Environment of Lived Erasure

Dunlap (2021, 213) explains that ‘lived erasure’ is experienced by never knowing who or what previously lived and flourished in environments where one lives, visits, or passes through. The current developments in Wieringermeer are relatively new, ongoing, and very much contested thus the locals are aware of the alterations made to their landscape. But they do fear that their area will start missing inhabitants, lifeways, and social-cultural value systems that once lived and were essential to nourishing the health of the Wieringerpolder. Thus, the acts of multinationals, governments, and local proponents of renewable energy transition – whether knowingly or not – steer the local community towards its cultural genocide.

The post-liberal conception of genocide, which views humans as sensitive and complex in the way they live and experience life, is consequential for local groups who place so much importance on their land and natural resources that any threat to remove or change them is a direct threat to the survival of their culture. Taken to its natural end, genocide greatest environments of lived erasure. Environments where various human and nonhuman persons

have been erased (Dunlap 2021, 213). The identity of Wieringermeer as a modern-rational-landscape is unique in “that we have large open spaces, so we are relatively dark. That we are a very large agricultural area with very good arable land. That is what makes us really unique. The everyday landscape should be determined by the seasons and not by industry” (Ellis). With the current industrial developments and their impacts as previously explained these qualities are disrupted and under threat. Important is that places influence the peoples lived experiences, something Daan narrated as “it is important that rural areas are not only for agriculture and nature, but also ... for people to experience in the weekends and their free moments.”

Furthermore, the divisions in local society were noted as a great loss by Eva who said that “you cannot buy everything with money” when she expressed her sadness about the declined social cohesion. Short (2016 in Dunlap 2017, 225-230) said “the destruction of the social figuration” can be “accomplished by non-violent means”. It is this “destruction” that can accomplish the cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples when confronted with the *fait accompli* that often precedes renewable energy transition. Moreover, “social death can occur without a specific “intent to destroy” but it is “social death ...[that] makes one act or series of acts genocidal, not the method by which such destruction is achieved” (Dunlap 2021, 213-214). The overall reflection of my research participants was that they increasingly disliked the developments in Wieringermeer but got used to them non the less, “those turbines are standing, we can’t think them away anymore” (Daan). This ‘getting used to’ something explicitly perceived as a threat and disruption is the core of cultural genocide through its generalizing process that disrupts the bond between local residents and their habitat. As evident during my conversation with Marie in which she mentioned that “after a while you don’t notice them anymore ... they don’t bother me that much” but a short while later she continued that “If this was in the benefit for the people, then maybe. No! Not even then! They need to stay away ... They need to remove them all, it has been enough! More than enough!” she concluded that she would not leave the area because all her friends lived there but that she really hated what was happening.

The consequences of the development cannot simply be reduced to the changes to the landscape and the perceptions of the residents about potential positive and negative outcomes, or even the very real social impacts on the community and its identity. The battle of the Wieringermeer is

ongoing. It includes the above issues, but also encompasses principles at the heart of liberal democracy. Part of the land being used for datacentres was once owned by the former minister and one-time European Commissioner of Agriculture, Sicco Mansholt. He was also one of the first tenant farmers to purchase land in the Wieringermeer back in 1938. One wonders whether he would have approved of the new developments that are, some say, a lineal descendant of the programs he once championed. It is ironic that one of the ultimate Wieringers, who helped forge the identity felt by the current inhabitants, might prove to be the original architect of its destruction.

Conclusion

In this research I interrogated the affects to residents' place identity generated by the contested developments resulting from wind energy developments in the Wieringermeer area of the Netherlands. Herein I addressed that while the renewable energy transition derived from climate concerns it follows the same extractive logic and power frame of the fossil fuel sector and causes similar contestations. In addition, I demonstrated disruptions and threats to place identity along a material and social background, focussing on the dynamic relations between person and place. Furthermore, I positioned the threats to person-place relations to the process of 'cultural genocide' through the use of 'political death' resulting from energopower practices which results in 'environments of lived erasure'. To show that the story of wind energy is more complicated than its advocates would have us believe, I ascertained how the windfarm constructions and related economic developments affect place identity and attachment of the Wieringermeer Residents. In contrast to traditional anthropological fieldwork has my research been conducted from the safety of my student housing in Utrecht to comply with the ethical notion of 'do-no-harm' during the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, the obtained data, findings, and insights did not contain the detail-oriented quality that results from 'being in the field', a significant loss when researching notions on 'social cohesion' and 'cultural decline'.

Social-Environmental Impacts

Wind turbines, datacentres, and greenhouses are modern structures that have a strong contrasting effect with the agricultural character of the Wieringerpolder. Consequently, they dominate the landscape and perceived by my interviewees as not belonging to their home area. All my research participants mentioned this concern from own accord without me having to steer the conversation, showing the strong emotional attachments upon their area. This social and material dimension upon change is the result of the social-environmental notion that persons and places are part of the same system (van der Leeuw 2018), thus mutually influence each other (Peng et al. 2020). The elements that bond the Wieringers with their residential area are explained by Gordon (2010) as place attachments, established through positive associated memories, feelings, meanings, and beliefs. When negative experiences, such as experienced bird deaths, replace the prior positive connections the attachments to place are disrupted and revised. While not explicitly mentioned, there is an indication for impacts to mental health of

the residents due to the enforced upon alteration to their surroundings. It is certain that the windfarm have a strong impact on the perception of the landscape that is supposed to remain “a modern rational agricultural area” (Daan). The problem is that open landscapes, like the Wieringermeer, are often preferred because they are more profitable – here is the dilemma and the irony of the situation: open landscapes provide good profits for wind turbine companies but make the most significant negative impact upon rural landscapes. This paradox reflects the work on ‘green capitalism’ by Mitchell (2009; 2011) and that of Kirsch (2009) on ‘oxymoronic terms’ that both contribute to the continuation of ‘extractive economies’ and structures of ‘energopower’ (Boyer 2011; 2014) in the renewable energy transition

Dividing Society

Processes of segregation or ‘dividing society’ are present in the Wieringermeer through the separation of migrant workers in enclaves (natives versus multinationals) but also by the uneven distribution of benefits in local society (natives versus natives). Anderson (2015, 3) explains, places are “saturated with cultural meanings” and words like “our home, our “backyard”, our “area” (ibid, 51) resonate and fortify our inclusion. Conversely, the current developments and influx of guest workers are not in compliance with Wieringer culture and have the affect that the Wieringers experience the alterations as ‘out of place’, but also hold the unease of being ‘displaced’ themselves. Most of the negative perceptions of the Wieringers centred on the jobs created by the windfarms and the resulting changes to the social fabric of the community. Residents were often critical of the government, the employment company, and the greenhouse companies on Agriport for the treatment of workers. The perception among many residents is that ‘permanent’ workers benefit the community because they stem the outward flow from the villages caused by young people leaving to attend college or university or to gain more desirable jobs. However, the problem remains that most workers stay only for the season and do not integrate into the community. As with any migrant workforce, it takes time for social integration, and the continual influx and departure of seasonal workers will only continue to slow the process. The main perceived negative outcome after the issue of seasonal workers was the disharmony and perceived reduction in social interactions between residents. The main reason that the social cohesion among residents’ declines is the division caused by the perceived unequal spread of compensations determined by the distance between house and turbine, and the excessive amount of money paid for the solitary turbines previously owned by local farmers.

In consequence, discontent among the residents arises from their awareness that their fellow Wieringers might receive more compensations or opportunities. Moreover, the reality of the renewable energy transition in the Wieringermeer is that not all citizens are opposed to the windfarm, greenhouses, and datacentres and there is an obvious problem when developments are contested by other locals seeking to maintain their lifestyles, further complicating the contestations in the local politics.

Energopower

Monbiot (2003, back cover) argues that “everything has been globalised except democracy”. The irony is that if one loses rights (democratic or otherwise), one cannot then accept responsibility nor take the blame. There is an irony that when it comes to decisions about power in their community, the residents of the Wieringermeer feel overwhelmingly powerless. Some are antipathetic, others much more engaged but lacking the authority or ability to influence decision-makers. Even a proponent of wind turbines interviewed for this study, Ellis, a local resident with a wind turbine on her property and connections to the industry, believed that the datacentres were “closed strongholds” and that “councillors manipulated the data” during the consultation process. There seems to be little doubt that, despite the pretensions to consultation, sounding boards, and public information meetings, the concerns of the local community have been mostly disregarded. Even the local politicians, criticised by most residents for their inability to stand up for their constituents, may simply not have had the power or wherewithal to achieve any significant benefits to the local community. Boyer (2011; 2014) developed the notion of 'energopower' to explain that the extractive logic of fossil fuels continues with renewable energy developments. Energopower is the political effort to dominate the economic process of harnessing electricity and fuel in order to maintain control of communities. Consequently, the transition the renewable energy production in Wieringermeer shows that the political effort to confront and destabilize dominant fossil-fuel systems of economic energy power results in authoritarian political tendencies that contribute to ‘greening’ capitalism instead to the intended climate mitigations. The research participants feared to become “some kind of third world area for the multinationals such as Microsoft and Google” (Daan).

Many residents were upset at the local government’s lack of consultation, but they were dismayed when promises were made and then broken. As long-time independent politician Kees said when interviewed, “Yes, of course, you are dealing with local politics ... with people

who are well-intentioned and who also want to do something for the municipality ... but they simply lack the political experience in a debate in which they are actually simply put away by those big boys from the VVD and CDA ...” Progress has a long line of victims who lacked the agency to promote their perceived interests when change became inevitable. The residents of the Wieringermeer might have to add their names to the list. Residents are exploited because they are small actors with little agency in a game played by powerful interests outside their community. Consequently, it is natural that those charged with protecting the local community’s interests – the local government – are apportioned most of the blame. Consistent themes among residents were that they were either not consulted or, when they were, their recommendations or concerns were not taken into account, or they were misled. Although the processes are democratic in theory this holds no meaning if they are not accessible, or user-friendly, for the Wieringers. This inaccessibility to democratic power is the result of ‘the resource curse’, which refers to the paradox that wealth of natural resources results in “stagnation of social development and poverty; high conflict ... and tendency toward authoritarian regimes” (Reyna et al. 2008). Marie said the authorities “just pretend like they're listening to you and then, yeah, then just nothing more.”

Cultural Genocide – Power and Profits thump People and Place

Perhaps the saddest effects of the renewable energy transition are the social divisions and the cultural ‘genocide’ that often follow the implementation of new developments (Dunlap 2021). While government and business seek to flex their considerable power, they would do well to heed the warning of Karatani (2014, 1) who thought the three structures were a “Borromean knot, in which the whole system will fail if one of the three is missing”. If the economic and political imperatives of renewable energy transition force fissures in the place identity of my research area the Wieringermeer in the Netherlands, what then becomes of local culture? Cultural genocide is the elimination of the traits of a group that form the identity of that group (Dunlap 2021). The overall reflection of my research participants was that they increasingly disliked the developments in Wieringermeer but got used to them non the less, “those turbines are standing, we can’t think them away anymore” (Daan). This ‘getting used to’ something explicitly perceived as a threat and disruption is the core of cultural genocide through its generalizing process that disrupts the bond between local residents and their habitat and determines the cultural legacy for the next generation. In the end it might not be worthwhile to

think of the changes to the Wieringermeer in terms of the landscape, or even of the landscape's connection to the locals and their identity. "The idea of a landscape presupposes an outside from which it can be viewed, grasped and framed from a certain distance" (Kuijpers 2021). The changes in ownership and the legal frameworks around which the new developments in the Wieringermeer have proceeded are fundamental to the structures determine "the conditions under which developments take place, who has access to them, and how social benefits and burdens are ultimately distributed". While cultures are impacted and residents have no self-efficacy to effect meaningful change or even have an impact in the process, structure contains to gain momentum. Even if the people of the Wieringermeer were to revolt and force change, to a point, the multinationals would simply pack up their tools and move to a more profitable location.

The changes in the Wieringermeer that are most important are those that are invisible. It is easy to see a wind turbine or a datacentre or a greenhouse. It is much harder to see energopower or the political and economic imperatives that threaten to eliminate a cultural identity. Einstein (in Thorpe 2015) said that we cannot solve our problems with the same way of thinking that we used when we created them, and that the great solutions will only be found by breaking the rules. Perhaps we need some new thinking to solve the increasingly complex problems that appear to be the responsibility of no one, not even those who make the decisions.

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Attachment I | Summary/Samenvatting

Deze bachelor thesis onderzoekt de betwistingen die worden gegenereerd en voortvloeien uit de ontwikkeling van windenergie in het gebied Wieringermeer in Nederland. Deze regio, plaatselijk bekend als de Wieringerpolder, is onderdeel van de gemeente Hollands Kroon en is al twintig jaar onderhevig aan grootschalige economische ontwikkelingen, met het einde nog niet in zicht. Deze ontwikkelingen begonnen met de bouw van kassen die het gebied voor het eerst als interessant bestempelden voor nationale en internationale economische ontwikkeling. De komst van de windparkontwikkeling in deze regio is vooral te danken aan het feit dat Wieringermeer een uitstekende locatie is voor windenergieopwekking. Windenergie is een essentieel onderdeel geworden van groene economieën en een hoeksteen van de mitigatie van klimaatverandering. Hoewel de transitie naar hernieuwbare energie voortkomt uit bezorgdheid over het klimaat heeft het onderzoek bevonden dat de groene economie dezelfde extractieve logica volgt als de fossiele brandstofsector met vergelijkbare disharmonie als gevolg. De groene energie van de Wieringermeer wordt verkocht de multinationals Microsoft en Google om hun plaatselijk gebouwde datacenters te kunnen voorzien van energie met een duurzaam imago. Voor de omwonende, de Wieringers, zijn de voortgaande ontwikkelingen in hun gebied een ongewenste industrialisatie die de kwaliteit van hun weidse agrarische landschap aantast. Deze perceptie is niet alleen gebaseerd op de komst van multinationals of de visuele veranderingen in het gebied, maar ook op de *processen* van de ontwikkelingen, die door veel bewoners worden omschreven als ondemocratisch, onrechtvaardig en ongelijk.

Het is geen toeval dat het windpark in de Wieringermeer is geplaatst. Nederland was de eerste staat waarin burgers met succes hun overheid dwongen om de uitstoot actief te verminderen door in 2019 de wettelijk bindende 'Klimaatwet' te ondertekenen. Waarmee de Nederlandse zaak de sterkste beslissing over klimaatverandering ooit door een rechtbank vervaardigt representeert, de enige die overheidsbeleid heeft afgedwongen, waardoor Nederland een bewijsgrond is voor andere milieurechtszaken wereldwijd. De wetwijzigingen laten zien hoe democratische invloeden met succes strategieën en beleid van krachtige energiestructuren kunnen uitdagen. Windpark Wieringermeer is een van de projecten die voortkomen uit de nieuwe wetten en belangrijke ontwikkelingen in de zoektocht naar een duurzaam energienetwerk in Nederland. Maar hoewel gepromoot als een belangrijke vooruitgang voor de Nederlandse transitie naar hernieuwbare energie, is het windpark in eigendom van het Zweedse energiebedrijf Vattenfall, zwaar gesubsidieerd door de Nederlandse overheid van belastinggeld, en verkocht aan machtige internationale bedrijven voor de

vervuilende datacenter industrie. Geen van deze hernieuwbare energie wordt dus onderdeel van het landelijke energienetwerk, zoals wel was beloofd aan de plaatselijke bevolking.

De ironie wil dat de bewoners van de Wieringermeer zich overweldigend machteloos voelen als het gaat om beslissingen over macht in hun gemeenschap. Sommige zijn antipathisch, andere zijn veel meer betrokken, maar missen de autoriteit of het vermogen om besluitvormers te beïnvloeden. Zelfs een voorstander van windturbines die voor dit onderzoek werd geïnterviewd, een lokale bewoner met een windturbine op haar terrein en connecties met de industrie, geloofde dat de datacenters gesloten bolwerken waren en dat raadsleden de gegevens manipuleerden tijdens de consultatie werkwijze. Het lijkt weinig twijfel dat, ondanks de pretenties van overleg, klankborden en openbare informatiebijeenkomsten, de zorgen van de lokale gemeenschap grotendeels zijn genegeerd. Zelfs de lokale politici, die door de meeste inwoners worden bekritiseerd vanwege hun onvermogen om op te komen voor hun kiezers, hebben misschien gewoon niet de macht of middelen gehad om significante voordelen voor de lokale gemeenschap te behalen. Progressie en ontwikkeling naar een duurzamere wereld heeft in dit geval een lange rij slachtoffers die niet de macht hadden om hun vermeende belangen te behartigen toen verandering onvermijdelijk werd.

Uiteindelijk is het misschien niet de moeite waard om na te denken over de veranderingen in de Wieringermeer in termen van het landschap, of zelfs de verbinding van het landschap met de lokale bevolking en hun identiteit. De veranderingen in eigendom en de juridische kaders waarrond de nieuwe ontwikkelingen in de Wieringermeer zijn verlopen, zijn fundamenteel voor de structuren die de voorwaarden bepalen waaronder ontwikkelingen plaatsvinden, wie er toegang toe heeft en hoe maatschappelijke lusten en lasten uiteindelijk worden verdeeld. Terwijl culturen worden beïnvloed en bewoners geen macht hebben om betekenisvolle verandering teweeg te brengen of zelfs maar invloed te hebben in het proces, bevat structuur om momentum te krijgen. Zelfs als de mensen van de Wieringermeer in opstand zouden komen en verandering zouden forceren, zouden de multinationals tot op zekere hoogte gewoon hun gereedschap inpakken en naar een meer winstgevende locatie verhuizen. De veranderingen in de Wieringermeer die misschien wel het belangrijkste zijn, zijn de onzichtbare. Het is gemakkelijk om een windturbine of een datacenter of een kas te zien. Het is veel moeilijker om energetische macht of de politieke en economische imperatieven te zien die een culturele identiteit dreigen te elimineren. Een deel van het land dat wordt gebruikt voor datacenters was ooit eigendom van de voormalige minister en voormalig Europees commissaris van Landbouw, Sicco Mansholt. Hij was ook een van de eerste pachters die in 1938 land kocht

in de Wieringermeer. Je kunt je afvragen of hij de nieuwe ontwikkelingen zou hebben goedgekeurd die volgens sommigen een rechtstreekse afstammeling zijn van de programma's die hij ooit verdedigde. Het is ironisch dat een van de ultieme Wieringers, die hielp bij het smeden van de identiteit van de huidige bewoners, de oorspronkelijke architect van de vernietiging zou kunnen zijn.