



Is participation enough to account for dissensus in electric grid projects generation? Limits and opportunities for stakeholders' engagement

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RSE Research Project:
“Development of the Transmission Electricity Grid”

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The Research Path

- Specific contribution to the Project
- Conceptual and Semantic Analysis
 - Trust
 - *Justice*
 - Procedural
 - Commutative
 - Distributive
 - Restorative
 - Intergenerational
 - *Environmental*



Background analysis

Having ascertain that:

- a) Electric grid planning and realization → competing perspectives on the current and future energy-related policy, particularly the debate on energy sources and generation&distribution models, and on the ownership and use of spaces in the interested areas;
- b) Traditional *cost-benefit analysis* increased rather than reducing public opposition (Schmidt and Lilliestam 2015);
- c) These issues have been addressed by adopting the *stakeholders' engagement theory* to reduce the number of alternatives and foster smooth communication amongst (part of) the stakeholders (e.g. Inspire-Grid project).



Gaps and lacks

Nevertheless...

- a) better information and communication, despite increasing the *perception* of justice, do not lead to *real* potentiality for co-decision as very little room is provided for radical changes and the stakeholders' engagement processes is often conceived as a persuasion tool;
- b) the issue of (distributive) justice proved to be particularly difficult to be taken into consideration when planning and managing energy-related infrastructures (both direct and indirect impacts)
→ these are addressed by the *environmental justice and conflict theory* (Agyeman, 2005; Alier, 2002);
- c) the analysis performed through stakeholders' engagement theory tends to smooth the most important aspect of antagonistic disputes



Environmental Justice theory emerged in the frame of Political Ecology and points out that environmental injustices occur when unaccountable social agents externalize the environmental costs of their decisions and practices to third parties in circumstances when the affected parties, or their representatives, have no knowledge of or input in the ecological risk-generating decisions and practices.

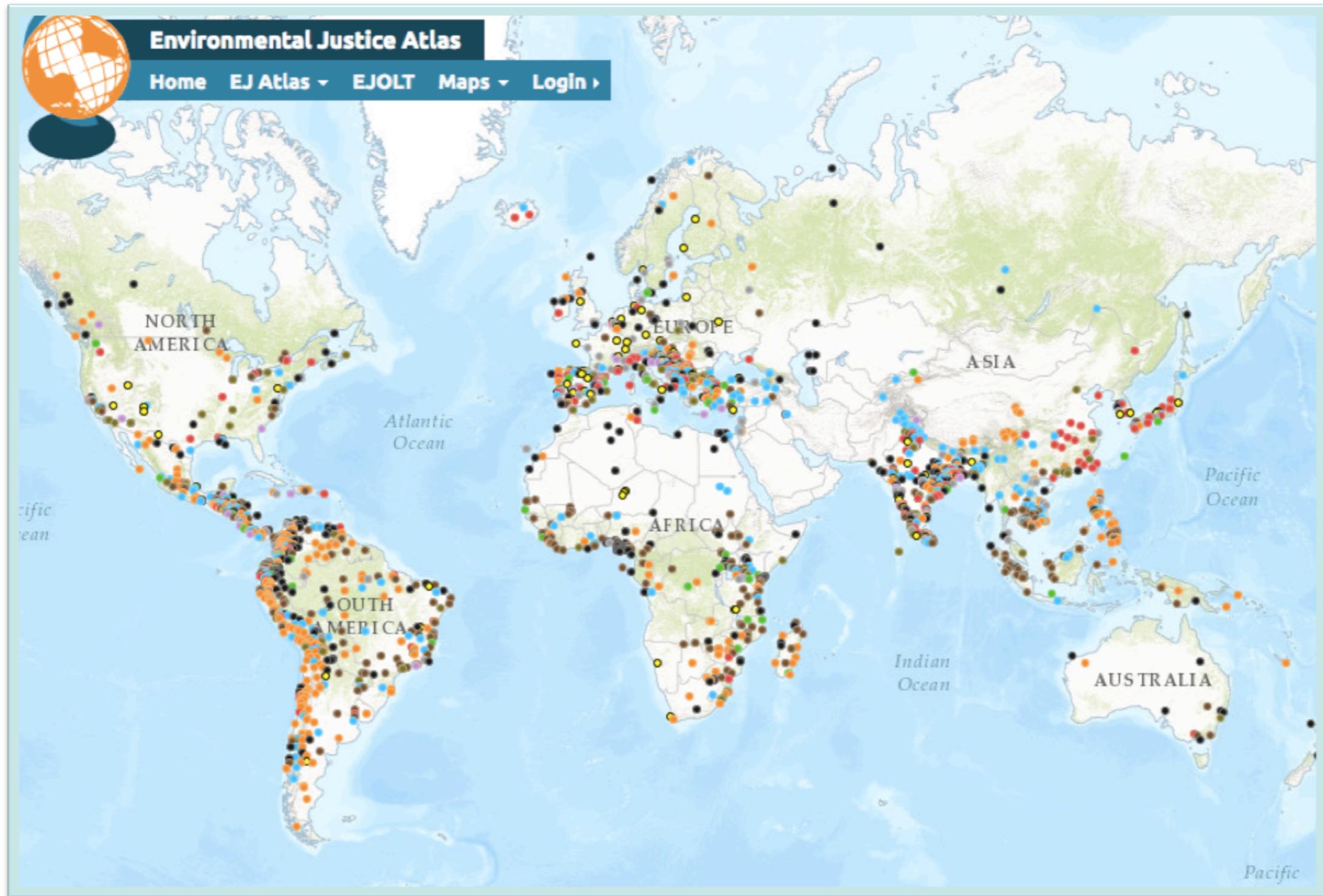
Environmental injustice conditions might lead to the emergence of **Environmental Conflicts**: “mobilizations by local communities, social movements, which might also include support of national or international networks against particular economic activities, infrastructure construction or waste disposal/pollution whereby environmental impacts are a key element of their grievances” (EJOLT, 2015).

Two elements characterize a conflict as an environmental conflict

- (1) the qualitative or quantitative reduction of natural resources or commons in a given territory (usable land, water, biodiversity, flora and fauna, minerals and finite sources of raw materials in general);
- (2) the presence of opposition/resistance from civil society (involved communities, social and environmental organization, local committees, stakeholders groups) mobilizing against initiatives (1)



Documenting dissensus...



<https://ejatlas.org/>



A taxonomy of conflicts

1. environmental conflicts generated by the socio-political consequences of environmental degradation;
2. environmental conflicts for the distribution, control and use of environmental resources and goods;
3. environmental conflicts as preventive action toward new material (e.g. planned infrastructural interventions) and non material (e.g. planned environmental regulation) initiatives which are reputed to be harmful in terms of environmental justice.



Our work in progress:

Two provisional goals:

1. Literature review and secondary data analysis aimed at considering what type of environmental conflicts emerges in reference to energy grids;
2. Considering whether mirroring stakeholders' engagement approach with environmental justice & conflicts approach may provide adequate consideration of dissensus.



Research outline

Our research attempts at providing an overview of the energy grid-related controversies from the perspective of environmental justice and conflict theory.

It builds on the assumption that:

- a) conflicts, controversies and disputes are not merely shortcomings of infrastructural projects, but rather genuine expression of a disagreement and mis-functioning deserving serious consideration;
- b) citizens' opposition (which manifest through environmental conflict) is not to be addressed merely by improving clarity of communication, but implicate a more substantial mobilization of the materiality and spatiality of daily life (Barry, 2013, Marres, 2012)



Our thesis is that:

Stakeholders' engagement process cannot be regarded as a “must-do” step in planning but rather a need, because grassroots-based stakeholders (specifically CSOs, NGOs and citizens) can actually bring new perspectives in the projects to be seriously considered by public management sectors and business, even when they adopt radically contrastive approaches.



Thesis – II

This would implies:

- a) a serious reconsideration of the proposed projects backed upon a technical evaluation of the alternatives (including for instance costs and impacts);
- b) the possibility to re-design the project together with interested social actors (whose competence gap, despite noteworthy, in some cases can be filled by citizen experts);
- c) the acceptance of *dissensus* and *conflict* as an unavoidable consequence of the pursuing contested *project forward*.



Thanks for your attention!

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