

Examining the Role of Developer Behaviour on Subsequent Community Mobilization During Infrastructure Development: An Organizational Justice Perspective

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The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the need to accelerate infrastructure development to build resilient and sustainable societies (United Nations, 2017). Yet such projects often affect local communities, prompting diverse responses: some communities mobilize in opposition – leading to delays, cancellations, or conflict – while others mobilize in support or do not mobilize at all (McAdam et al., 2010; McAdam and Boudet, 2012; Franks et al. 2014). What explains this variation in community mobilization? Existing research assesses variation in opposition and attributes the role of contextual or project-level factors, such as planning policy and visual impact (Boudet et al., 2011; Yu et al., 2015). However, variation in community mobilization is also evident among comparable projects within the same regions, suggesting that community and developer sources of variation matter. While recent work examines these sources (e.g., community education levels, developer foreignness), the potential role of developer behaviour – what a developer does to foster or neglect cooperative relationships with a community – has yet to be systematically examined (Bessette and Mills, 2021; Rand and Hoen, 2017). In addition, most studies focus on projects facing oppositional mobilization, neglecting projects that experience supportive mobilization (Giordono et al., 2016).

These limitations have important consequences. Without a clear understanding of how developer behavior may influence the likelihood of oppositional and supportive mobilization, efforts to mitigate oppositional mobilization and foster supportive mobilization remain poorly informed (Bowen et al., 2010; Rand and Hoen, 2017; Stadtler et al., 2024). Additionally, in overlooking the potential for supportive mobilization, as well as the potential role of developer behaviour, existing models of mobilization risk carelessly perpetuating a view among practitioners that communities are unreasonable adversaries, as well as risk carelessly ridding practitioners of their agency and responsibility with regards to community mobilization (Rowley and Moldoveanu, 2003; Bessette and Mills, 2021). To advance our understanding of oppositional and supportive community mobilization, and to provide actionable insights for infrastructure development practitioners, our study examines the potential role of developer behavior on the likelihood of subsequent community mobilization (oppositional and supportive) during infrastructure development.

Two key challenges have historically impeded such an examination: (1) access to comprehensive, comparable data on developer behavior and subsequent mobilization (or non-mobilization), and (2) meaningfully characterizing developer behavior (Bowen et al., 2010; Rand and Hoen, 2017; Stadtler et al., 2024). To overcome the former, we leverage a novel empirical context: the development of 76 major solar projects (30-50 MW) in England between 2022 and 2024. This context satisfies several key conditions for causal inference. First, it allows us to observe the full range of developer behavior leading up to potential community mobilization. In England, developers conduct community consultations and submit detailed reports documenting their engagement efforts. These reports provide rich, standardized data on developer behavior at scale – such reports are unavailable, to our knowledge, in other sectors or regions. Second, community mobilization occurs after the developer-community consultation phase, when Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) invite the potential host community (in England, the potential host ‘Parish’) to submit opinions on whether a planning application should be approved or rejected. This mobilization – whether oppositional, supportive, or absent – is publicly recorded in the form of letters to LPAs and LPA reports, enabling observation of community mobilization at scale. Importantly, minimal interaction typically occurs between the end of the consultation and the prompting of community mobilization, enhancing the completeness of our behavioral data. Third, the context offers natural variation in both developer behavior and community mobilization. By focusing on a single country, a single sector, a consistent policy regime, and a domain situated within the well-studied environmental movement, we are well-positioned to examine the potential role of developer behavior in community mobilization.

In terms of the latter – the challenge of meaningfully characterizing developer behavior – existing literature employs a mix of coarse typologies (e.g., active vs. passive, responsive vs. unresponsive, collaborative vs. transactional) or narrow descriptive indicators (e.g., number of meetings held) (Bowen et al., 2010; Rand and Hoen, 2017; Stadtler et al., 2024). These approaches lack consistent application and conceptual precision (e.g., Googins and Rochlin, 2000), making it difficult to draw generalizable insights. Despite their variation, many of these approaches characterize developer behaviour according to a continuum, wherein developers engage with communities more or less frequently, or offer greater or lesser compensation. Much of the infrastructure development literature assumes increased levels of each are inherently preferable or more effective (e.g., Lesbirel and Shaw, 2005; Stadtler et al., 2024). However, the influence of "more" is far from straightforward. For instance, some studies suggest that too much interaction or compensation can raise concerns about tokenism (Ryder et al., 2023). Others, such as McAdam and colleagues (2010), find that more interaction coincides with increased opposition, suggesting that such developer behaviour may be best conceptualized in terms of political opportunity. Still others, like Bartley and Child (2014), argue that organizational (or developer) behavior plays only a minor role in shaping stakeholder group (or community) mobilization. Combined, these inconsistencies and tensions underscore the need for a

more structured, comprehensive, and theory-driven approach to studying how developer behavior relates to community mobilization.

Amid these inconsistencies and tensions, a recurring insight stands out: community perceptions of fairness play a critical role in shaping responses to infrastructure development (Bowen et al., 2010; Rand and Hoen, 2017; Aaltonen et al., 2024). To examine this insight, we adopt Colquitt's (2001) organizational justice framework. The organizational justice literature identifies and validates four dimensions of fairness: distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice. Each dimension corresponds to a set of specific justice rules (e.g., equity, process control, truthfulness) grounded in widely shared norms about how organizations ought to treat stakeholders. Although the framework is predominantly applied to assess employee perceptions of their organization's behaviour, it offers a strong yet underutilized basis for evaluating how organizations, like developers, interact with external stakeholder groups, like communities (Husted, 1998; Colquitt et al., 2023). Drawing on this framework, we develop theoretically grounded measures of developers' adherence to each justice norm, translating survey-based measures for observational data. By encompassing procedural conduct, communication practices, interpersonal treatment, and perceived equity of outcomes, our approach provides a comprehensive and systematic basis for characterizing developer behaviour, enabling comparability across projects.

With an appropriate empirical context and theoretical approach in hand, we plan to run three sets of linear regressions to advance our understanding of oppositional and supportive community mobilization and to provide actionable insights for infrastructure development practitioners. The first set will assess the potential role of overall developer adherence to justice norms (*organizational justice measure*) on the likelihood of oppositional and supportive community mobilization. The second set, conditional on the first, will assess the potential role of dimensional developer adherence to justice norms (*distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice measures*) on the likelihood of oppositional and supportive community mobilization. This will provide insight into which practices most mitigate oppositional or foster supportive community mobilization. The third set, also conditional on the first, will assess the potential moderating effect of community attributes on the relationship between developer adherence to justice norms and the likelihood of oppositional and supportive community mobilization. This will inform the generalizability of our findings.

Taken together, these analyses aim not only to advance our understanding of community mobilization and offer actionable insights for infrastructure development practitioners, but also to contribute to the broader literature on organizational behaviour (what an organization does to foster or neglect cooperative relationships with stakeholders) and stakeholder group mobilization (Kujala et al., 2022; Rowley and Moldoveanu, 2003). By considering the role of developer behaviour on subsequent community mobilization, we aim to return agency to organizations as it pertains to stakeholder

relations and broader societal outcomes. By applying the organizational justice framework to developer-community relations, we aim to move characterizations of organizational behaviour beyond coarse, inconsistently applied typologies and narrow indicators, as well as to extend a well-established theoretical model beyond the context of employee relations (Kujala et al., 2022; Colquitt et al., 2023). By considering both oppositional and supportive mobilization, we aim to capture the full spectrum of potential stakeholder responses and highlight the potential role organizations play not only in shaping opposition, but also in shaping support (Giordono et al., 2016).

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