

Symmetries, expectations, dynamics and contexts: a framework for understanding public engagement with renewable energy projects

Gordon Walker

“Beyond Nimbyism: a multidisciplinary investigation of public engagement with renewable energy technologies”

- ESRC funded under TSEC programme 2005-2008
- Manchester, Lancaster, Surrey, Northumbria, Loughborough, Strathclyde
- Multidisciplinary team: geography, psychology, sociology, engineering, planning

- 42 Interviews with range of actors involved in renewable energy sector generally
- 10 case studies – interviews with key players in each project, questionnaire survey of local people, focus groups

http://geography.exeter.ac.uk/beyond_nimbyism/

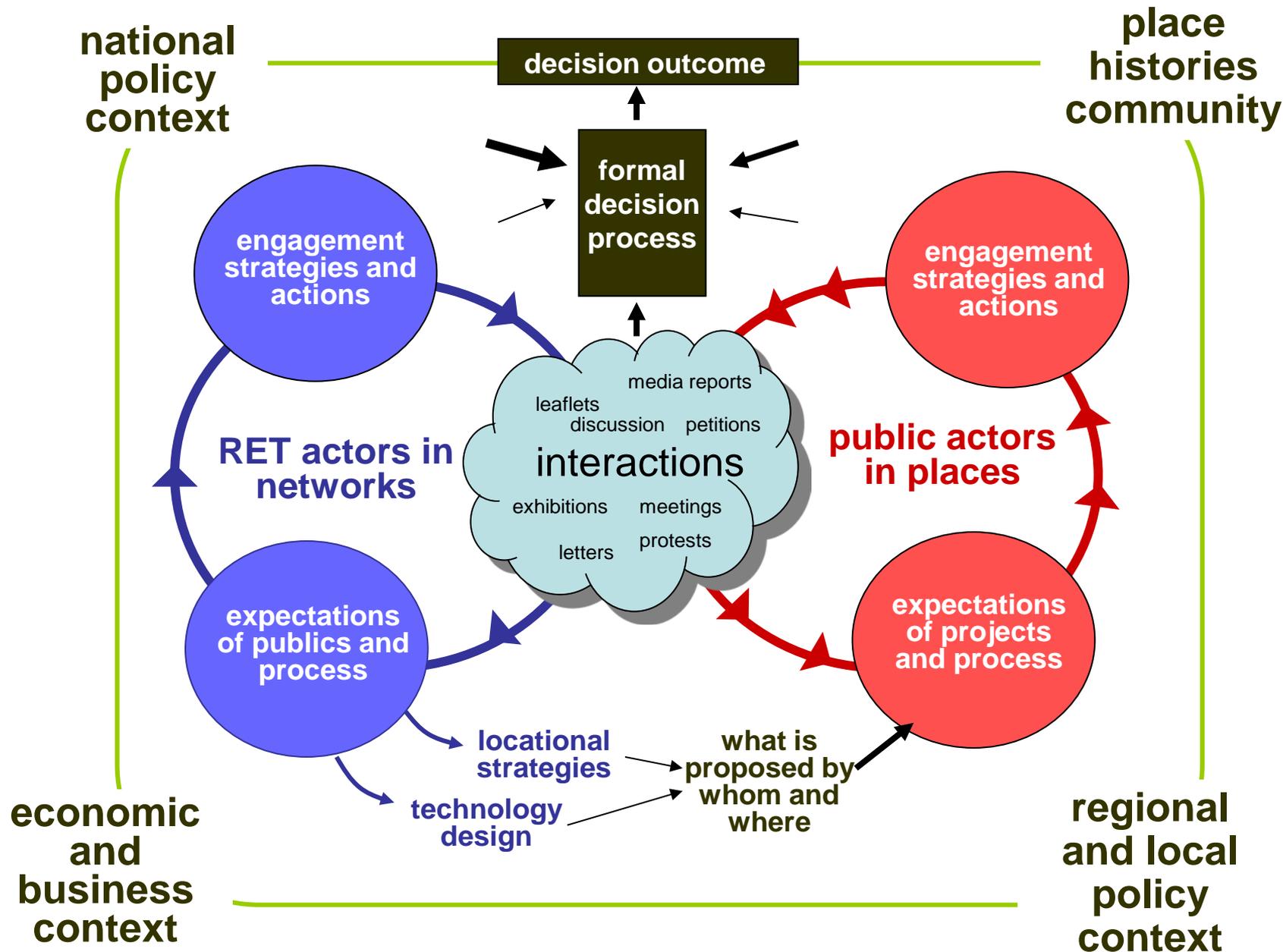
Project name	Sector	Scale	Location	Local opposition group	Planning Status
Gwynt y Mor	Offshore wind	750MW	Wales	Yes	Consented
Lincs	Offshore wind	250MW	England	No	Consented
Baxterley	Bioenergy	2.1MW	England	Yes	Refused/ appeal granted/ revised application
Port Talbot	Bioenergy	350MW	Wales	Yes	Consented
Ladymoor	Onshore wind (plus hydrogen)	48MW	Scotland	Yes	Wind farm refused/H2 consented
Falkirk	Onshore wind (urban)	Both 2MW	Scotland	No	Consented
Northants	Onshore wind (urban)	1MW	England	Yes	Refused
Sea Gen	Marine	2MW	Northern Ireland	No	Consented
Wave Dragon	Marine (wave)	7MW	Wales	No	Applied for
Lunar	Marine (tidal stream)	16-20 MW	Wales	No	Not yet applied for

Framework - Purpose

- for representing *different elements* of the overall research and how they fit together
- for *understanding* engagement, not recommending how to do it
- *descriptive/analytical* rather than predictive or prescriptive
- (as any framework) to *simplify* what is in reality highly complex – a general framework

Walker G et al (2011) 'Symmetries, expectations, dynamics and contexts: a framework for understanding public engagement with renewable energy projects', in Devine Wright P (ed) *Renewable Energy and the Public: from NIMBY to participation*, Earthscan, London, pp 1-14.

Gordon Walker, Patrick Devine-Wright, Julie Barnett, Kate Burningham, Noel Cass, Hannah Devine-Wright, Gerda Speller, John Barton, Bob Evans, Yuko Heath, David Infield, Judith Parks, Kate Theobald



symmetries

**renewable
energy actors
in networks**

**public actors
in places**

symmetries

renewable energy actors in networks

lead organisations,
site developers,
consultants

trade associations,
financiers,
technology
manufacturers

public actors in places

individuals and
collectives (groups,
organisations..)

symmetries

**renewable
energy actors
in networks**



**public actors
in places**

expectations

**RE actors in
networks**



Expectations ...
About 'the public'
About the place
About decision processes
About decision makers



**public actors
in places**



Expectations
About form and impact of
development
About the developer
About the process
About who should benefit

engagement strategies and actions

RE actors in networks

expectations of public and process

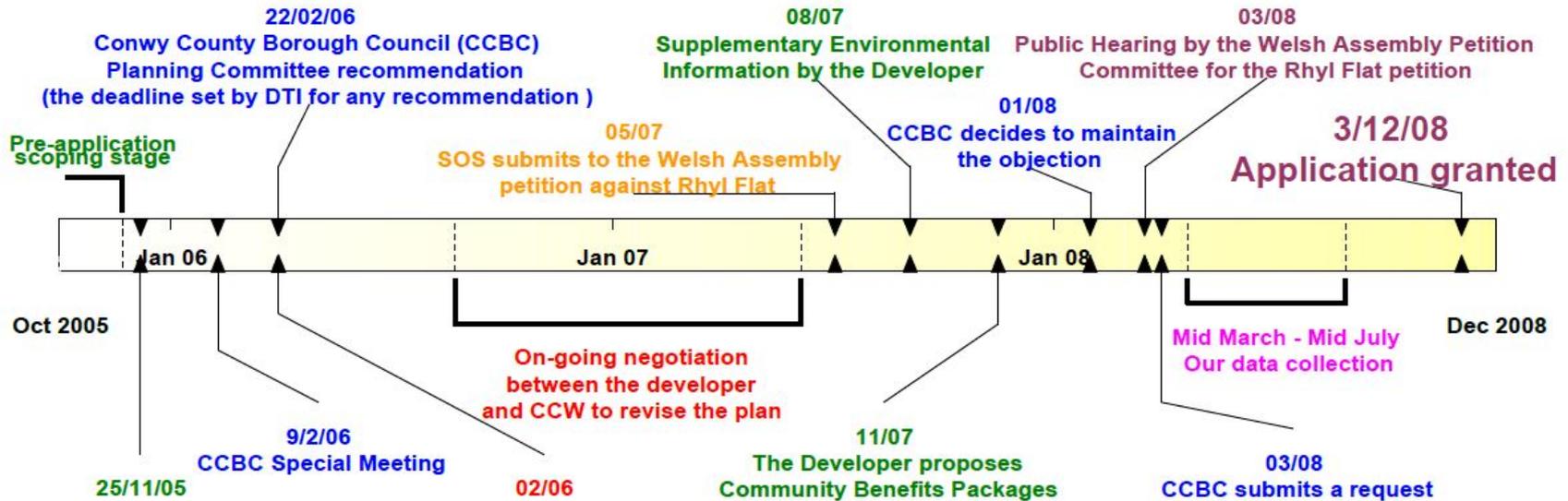
media reports
leaflets
discussion petitions
interactions
exhibitions meetings
letters protests

engagement strategies and actions

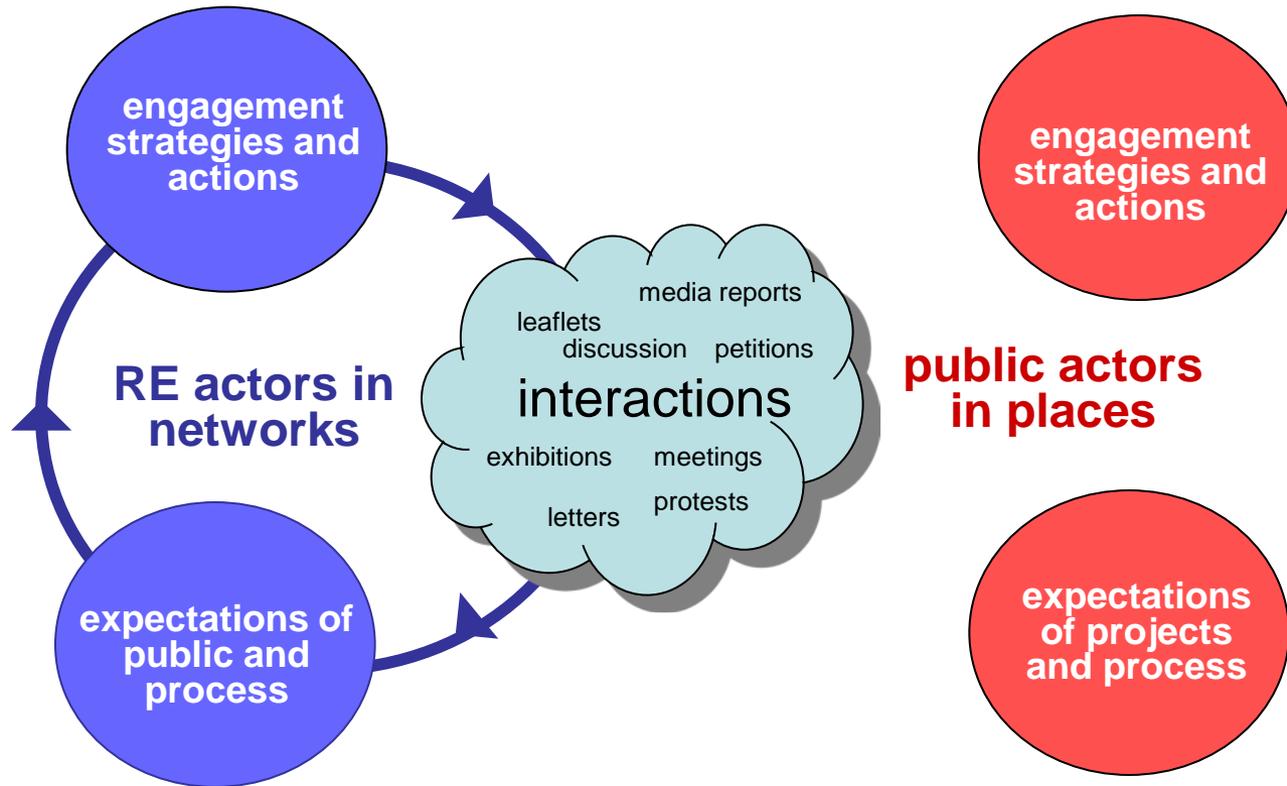
public actors in places

expectations of projects and process

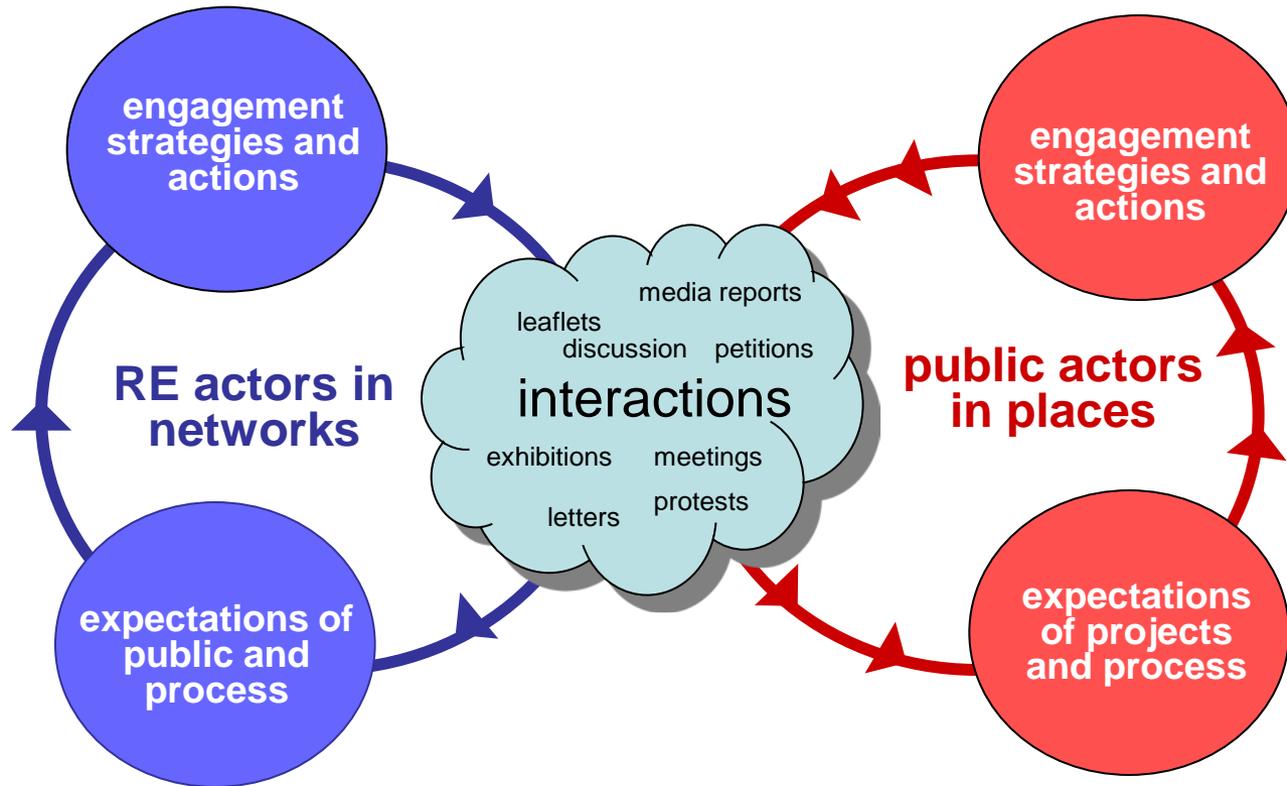
dynamics

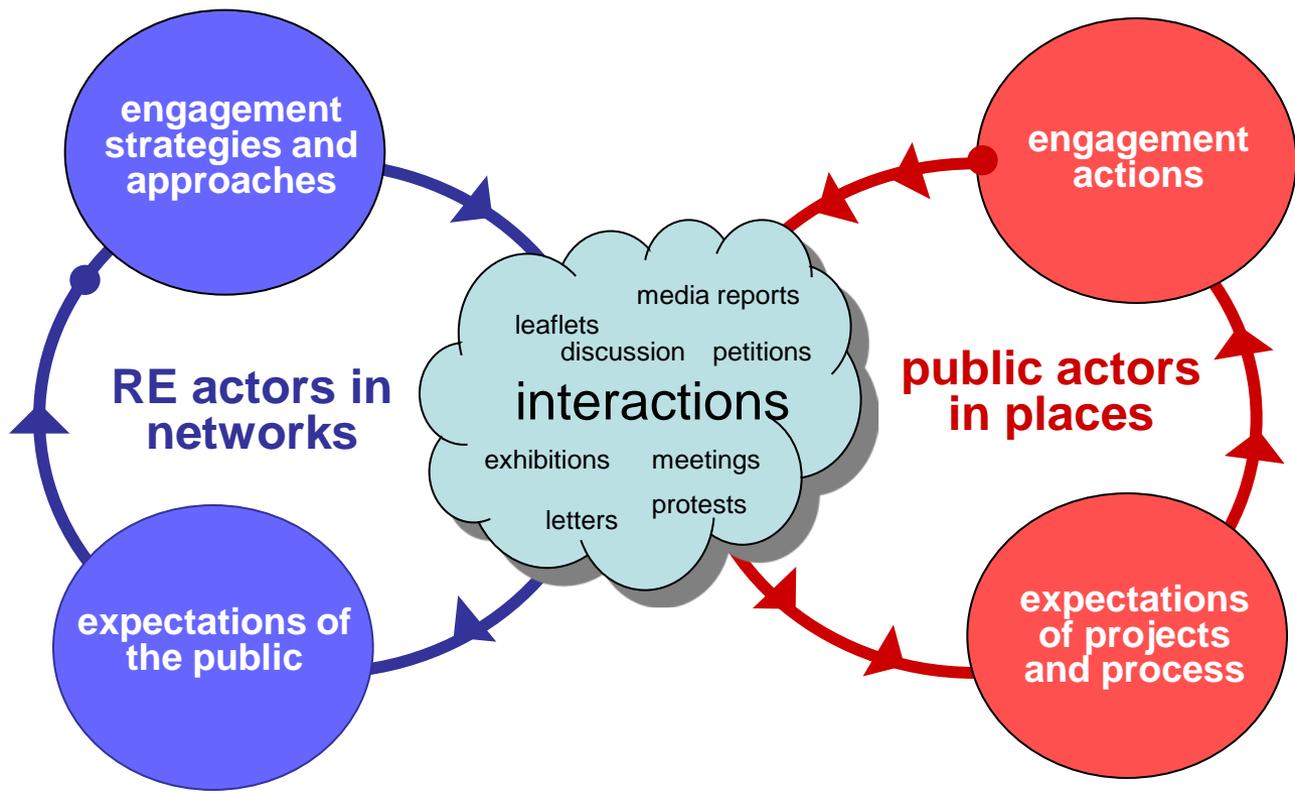


dynamics



dynamics





engagement strategies and approaches

RE actors in networks

expectations of the public

media reports
leaflets
discussion petitions
interactions
exhibitions meetings
letters protests

engagement actions

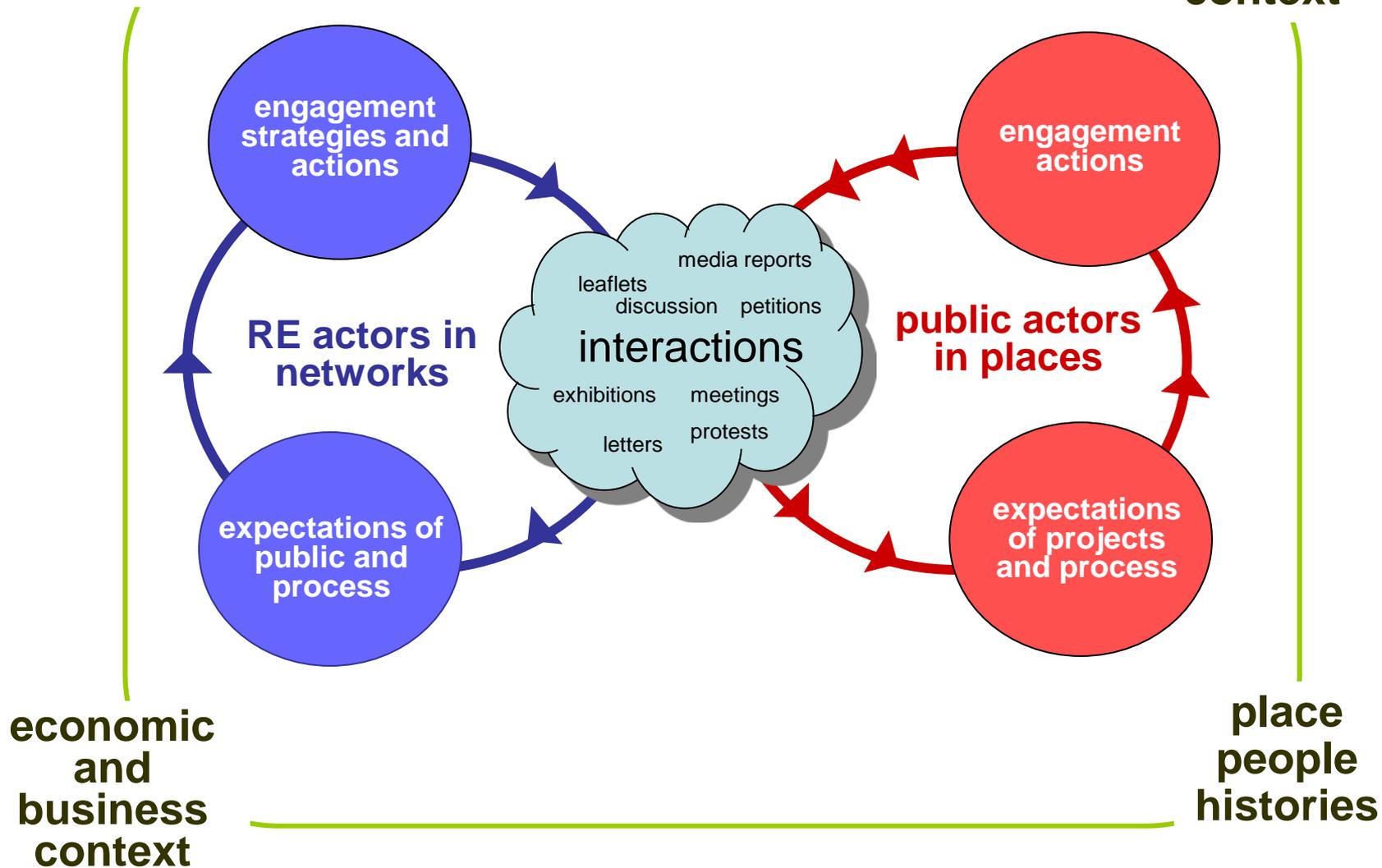
public actors in places

expectations of projects and process

contexts

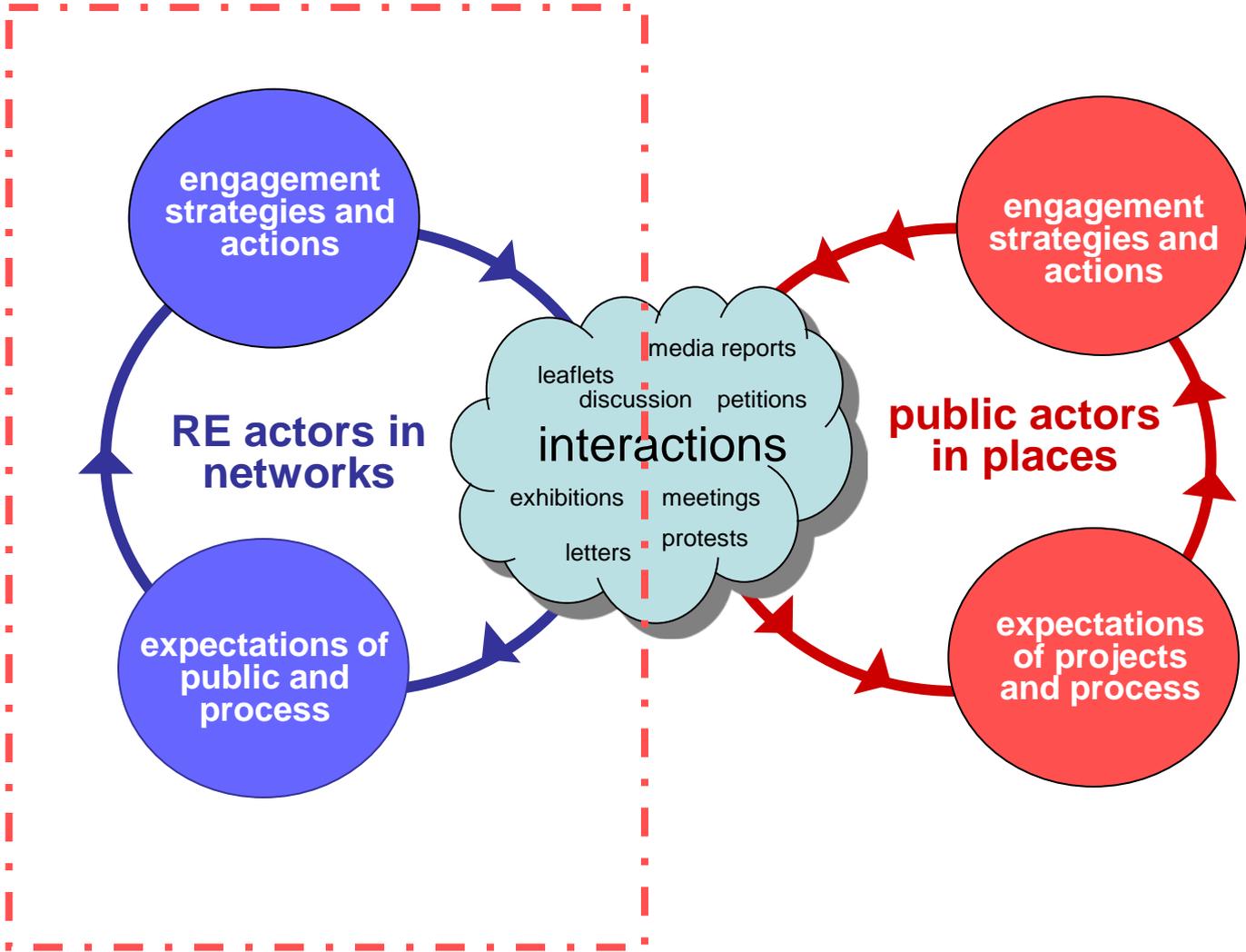
**national
policy
context**

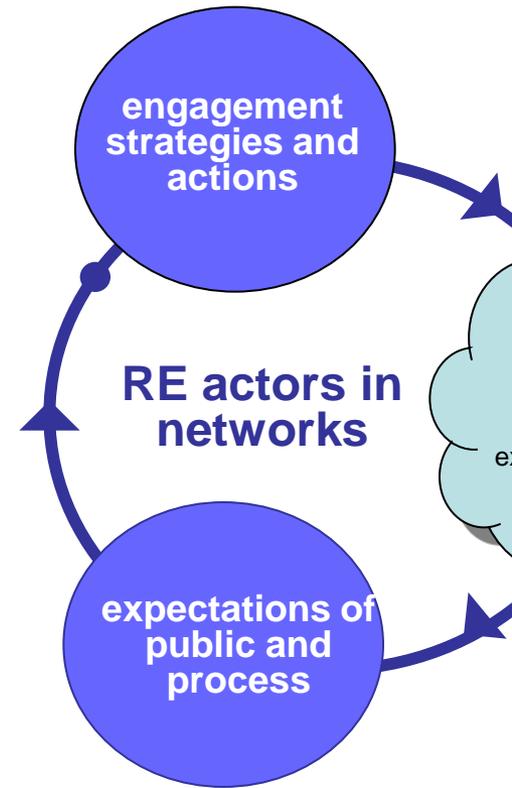
**regional
and local
context**



**economic
and
business
context**

**place
people
histories**





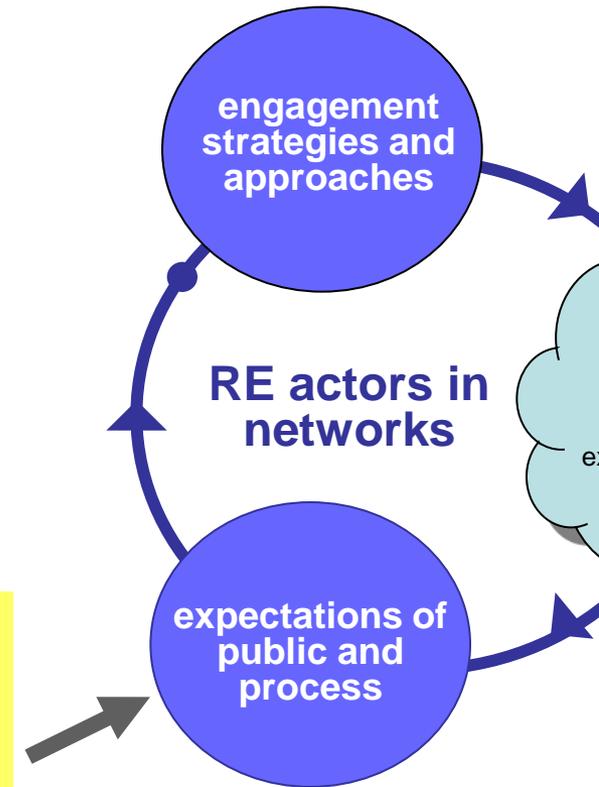
Burningham, K, Barnett, J, Walker, G and Cass N (2014) An array of deficits: Unpacking NIMBY discourses in wind energy developers' conceptualisations of their local opponents, *Society and Natural Resources*

Cass N and Walker G (2009) Emotion and rationality: the characterisation and evaluation of opposition to renewable energy projects. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 2, pp 62-69

Everyone has views on 'the public' – informed in different ways. Very shaped by **wind experience**.

For some public always '**NIMBYS**'; for others **depends** on local conditions and context; **unpredictable**

BUT always '**a real and present danger**' to project development

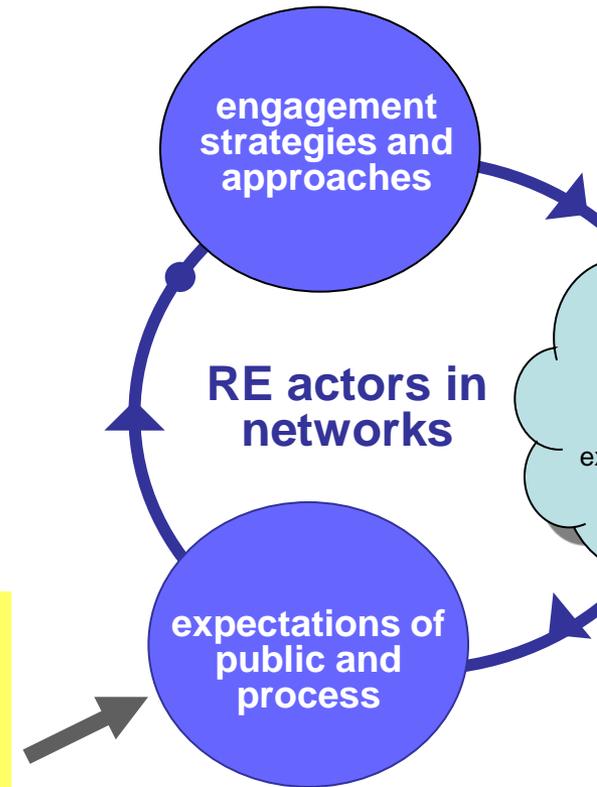


“We can’t sort of get ourselves too directly involved in the public engagement process, but ... we’re in wind so we know pretty much every development in the country. We kind of know what’s going on. We know the gossip. We know who talks to who. Everyone talks to us. We kind of know where it’s generally good and when it’s generally bad”
(Interview 36, Bank)

Everyone has views on ‘the public’ – informed in different ways. Very shaped by **wind experience**.

For some public always ‘**NIMBYS**’; for others **depends** on local conditions and context; **unpredictable**

BUT always ‘**a real and present danger**’ to project development



Engagement practices have become part of standard expectation and **routine** of the industry - to try and counter/avoid the '**real and present danger**'

Information provision the predominant rationale – to counter '**myths**' and '**emotional**' reactions. 'Information-deficit' model

Strategic about methods, timings, sequencing

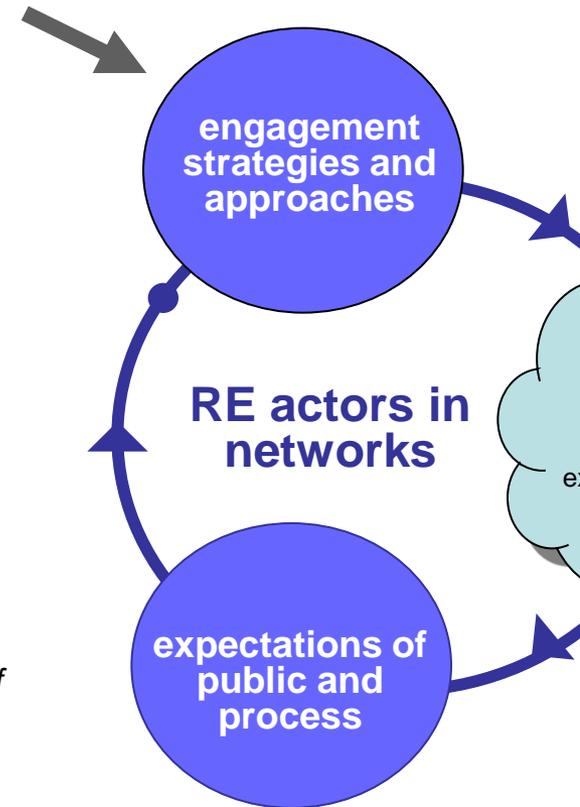
Borrowing and **learning** from sector to sector e.g. marine learning from wind

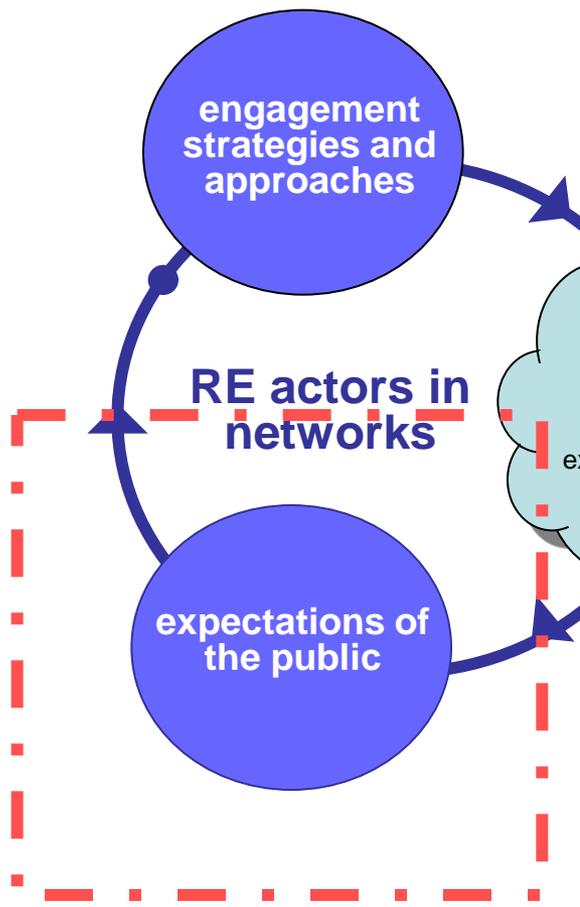
Benefit provision increasingly practised

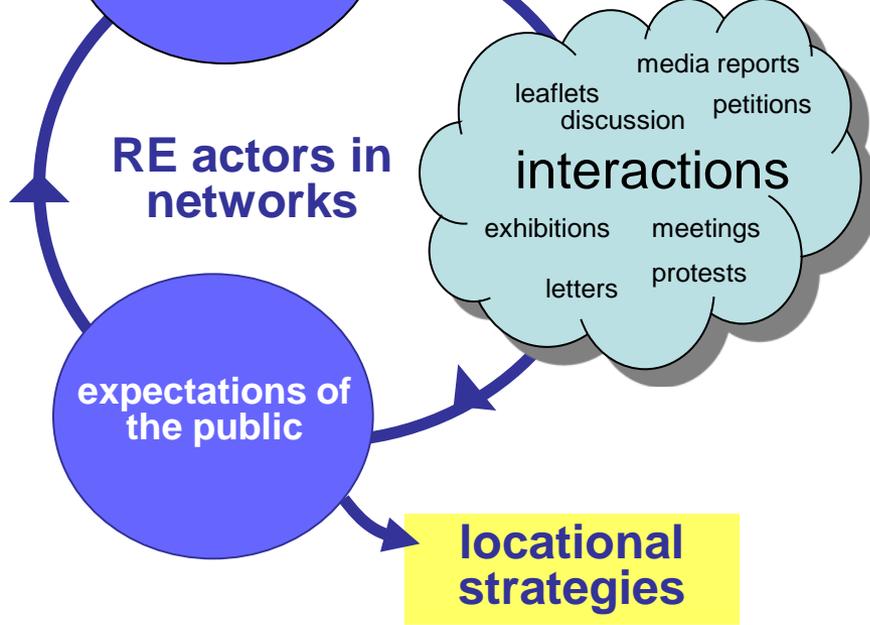
Barnett, J, Burningham, K, [Walker, G & Cass, N](#) (2012), '[Imagined publics and engagement around renewable energy technologies in the UK](#)' *Public Understanding of Science*, vol 21, no. 1, 36-50

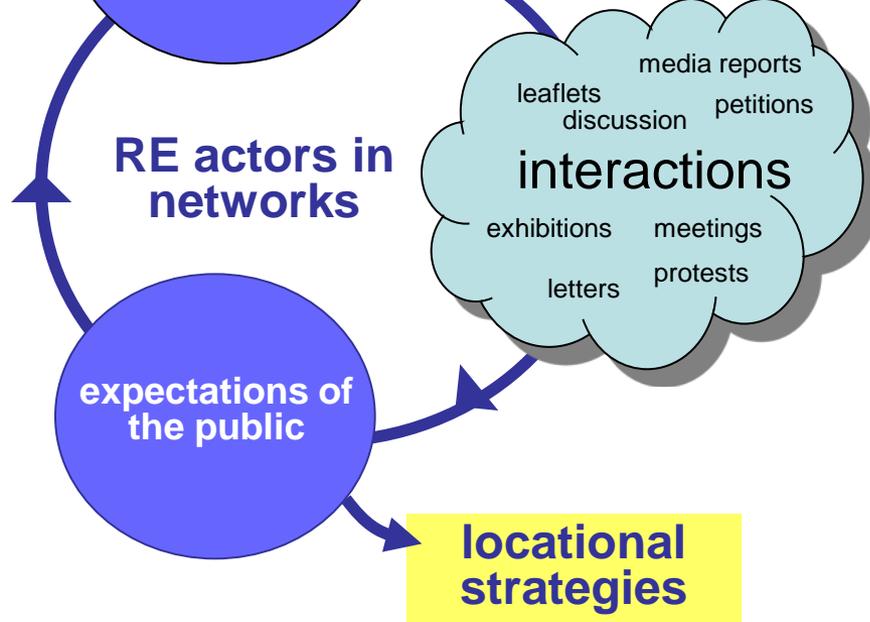
Bob Evans, Judith Parks and Kate Theobald (2011), '[Urban wind power and the private sector: Community benefits, Nimbyism and public engagement](#)', *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* Vol 54 (2): 227 - 244.

Cass N, Walker G and Devine-Wright P (2010) [Good Neighbours, Public Relations and Bribes: The Politics and Perceptions of Community Benefit Provision in Renewable Energy Development in the UK](#), *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, 12(3) pp 255-275





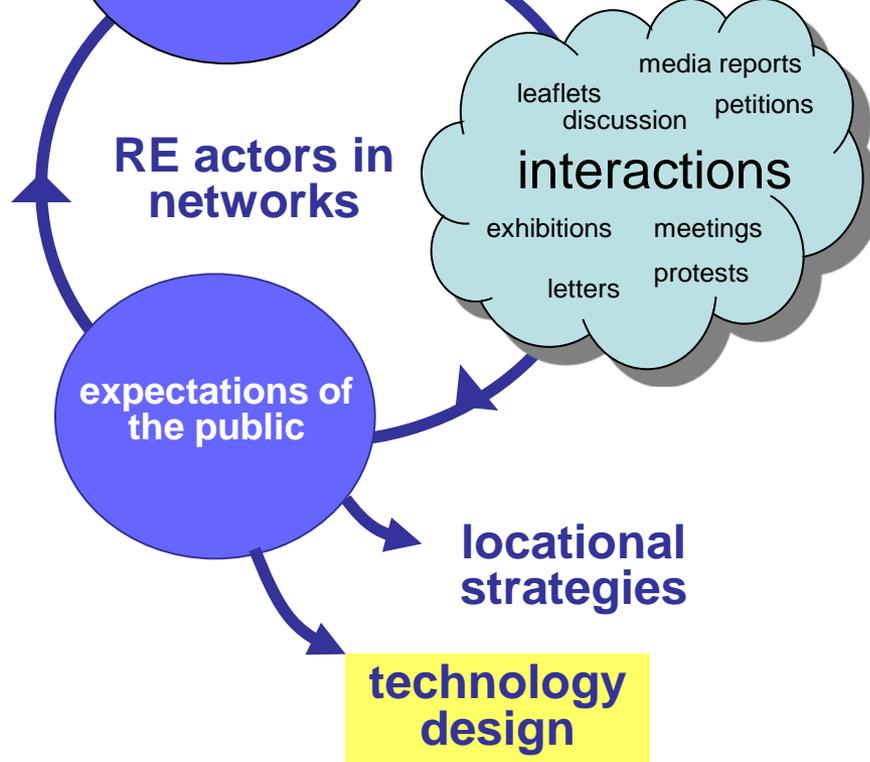




“if we perceive that there is local, strong local opposition to a project, we won’t touch it, we would not touch it (Bank 1)

“I think obviously we have a policy and preference for large wind farms offshore, because they’re out of sight out of mind” (Interview 31 Politician)

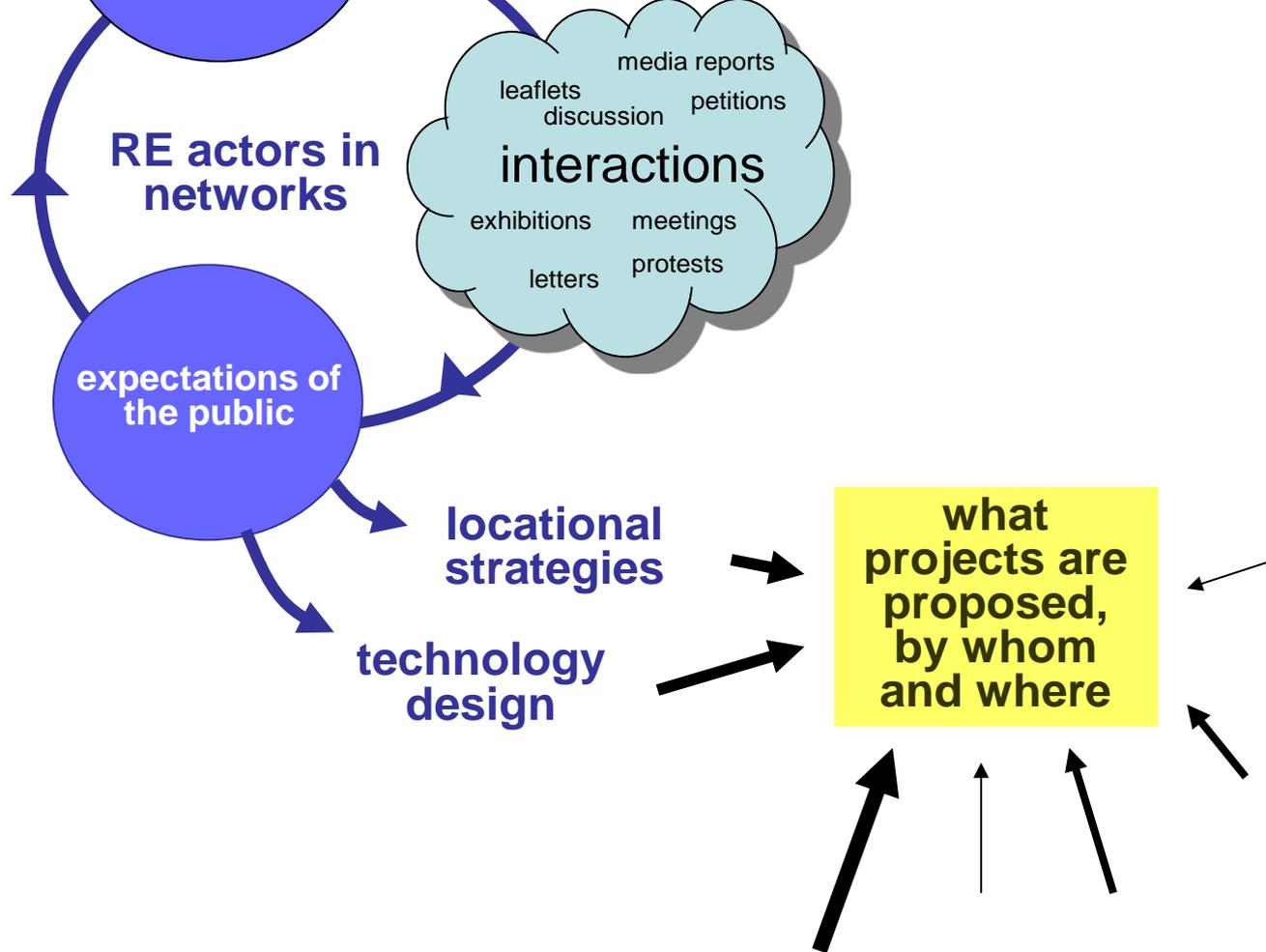
“You can probably win a bit, lose a bit, take a couple of trenches ... You know, there isn’t going to be the great push and the grand breakthrough. which is why we as a company don’t put huge reliance on the future of the UK market. It’s why we’re in China and elsewhere, because that’s my strategic view on the subject” (Interview 4, Developer)



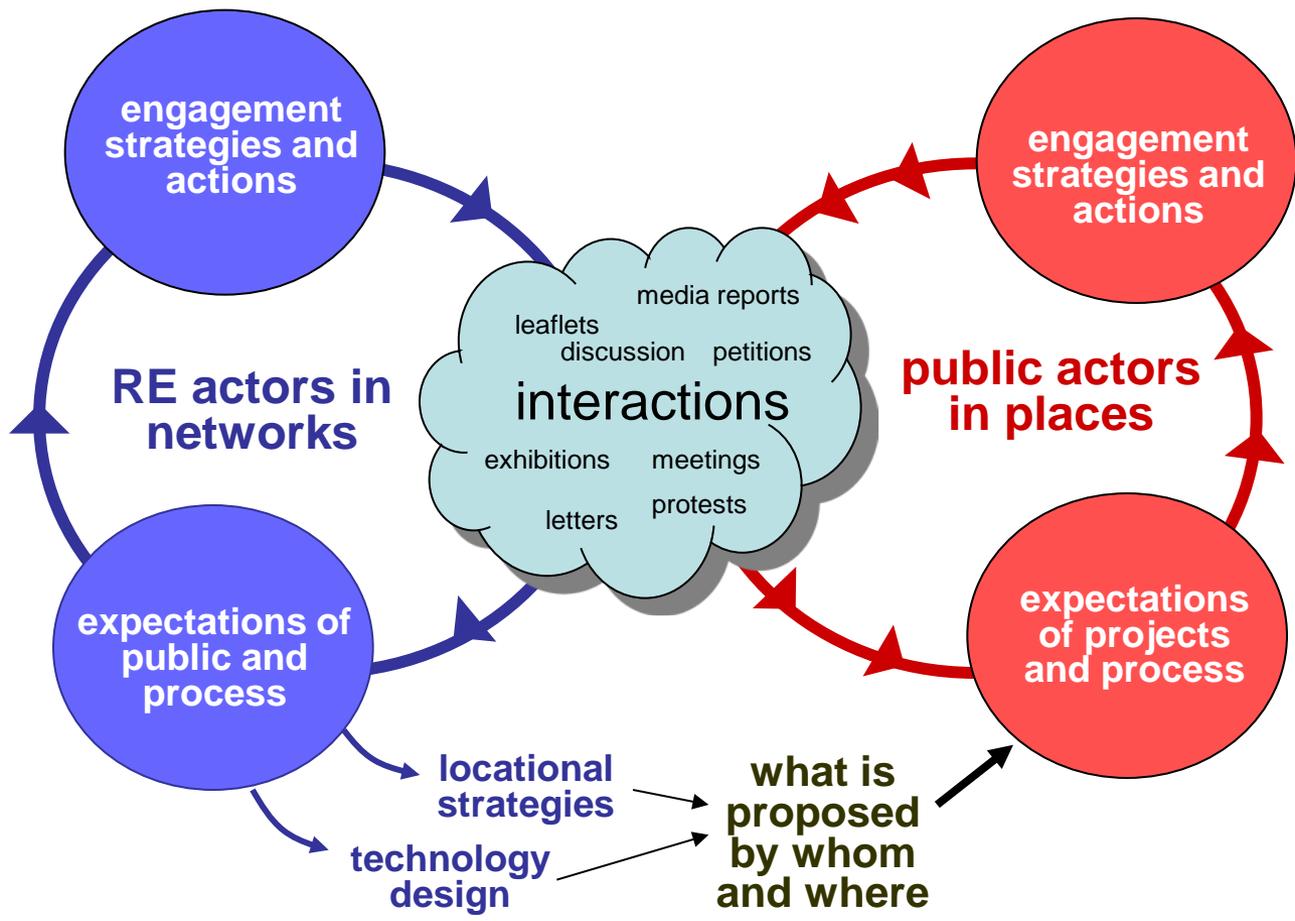
“I would say public reaction has prevented the deployment of two bladed turbines ... so fifteen years ago they were part of the choice, some people were making two, some people were making three” (Interview 17, Consultant)

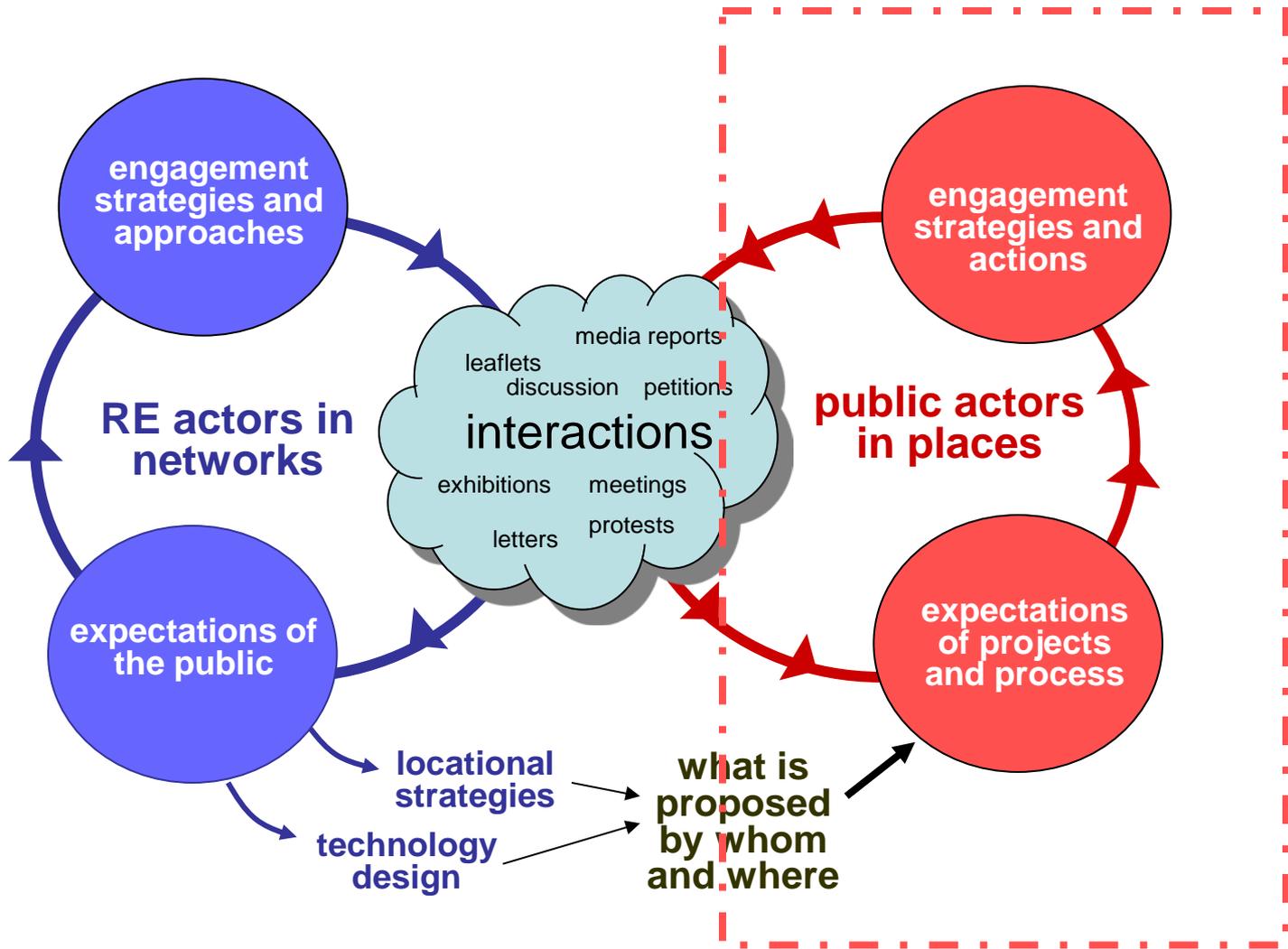
“I think if any of our competitors succeed in developing technologies which don’t actually have a visual impact, that could have an impact [on their success]” (Interview 23, marine manufacturer)

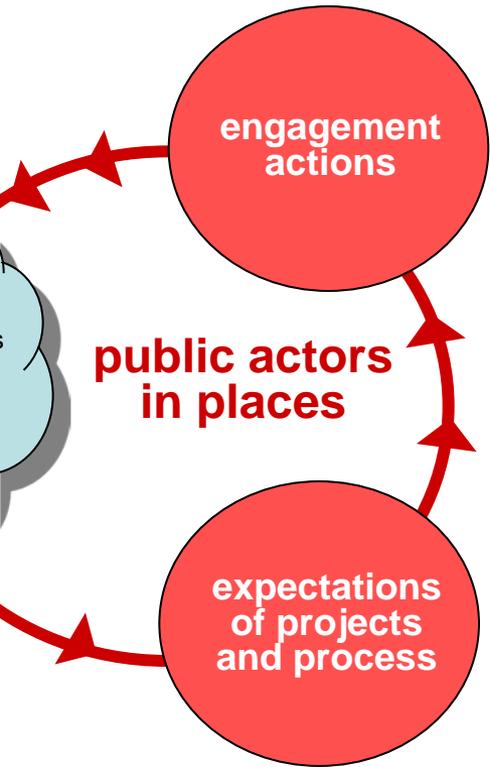
““..if a particular technology caused real problems for dolphins and you know, porpoises, that type of thing, that would drive, could stoke up public pressure” (Interview 20 Consultant)



Walker G, Cass N, Barnett J and Burningham K (2010) Renewable energy and socio-technical change: imagined subjectivities of 'the public' and their implications, *Environment and Planning A*, 42, pp 931-947

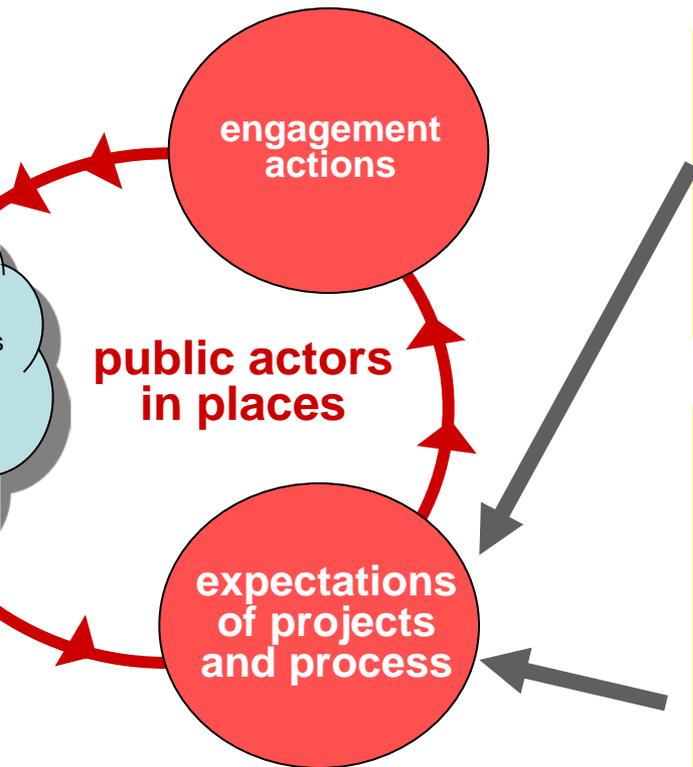






Devine-Wright, P. and Howes, Y. (2010) [Disruption to place attachment and the protection of restorative environments: a wind energy case study](#). *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 30, 271-280.

Devine-Wright, P. (2009) [Rethinking Nimbyism: the role of place attachment and place identity in explaining place protective action](#). *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*. 19(6), 426-441.



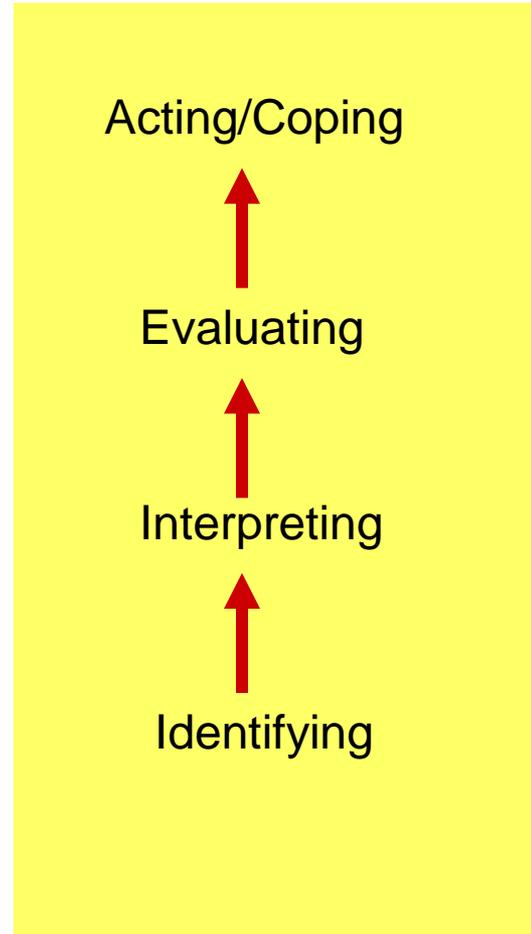
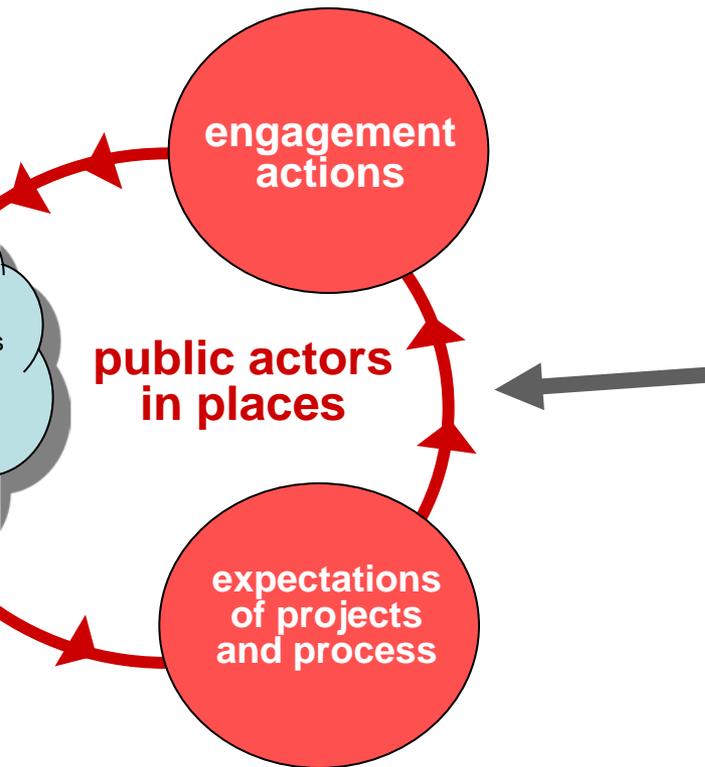
General beliefs about place, energy and planning:
Planning-related self-efficacy; place-related meanings and attachment; concern about climate change; general attitudes to renewable energy and to specific energy technologies

Specific beliefs about project and process:
Local perceived and expected impacts of a project. Who is benefiting, who is experiencing impacts?
Who the developer is - can they be trusted?

How is the decision process expected to work and how does it work in practice? Fairness, transparency, local or distant.

Expectations of communication and engagement – timing, frequency, amount, transparency

Beliefs about environmental performance



Evolving responses

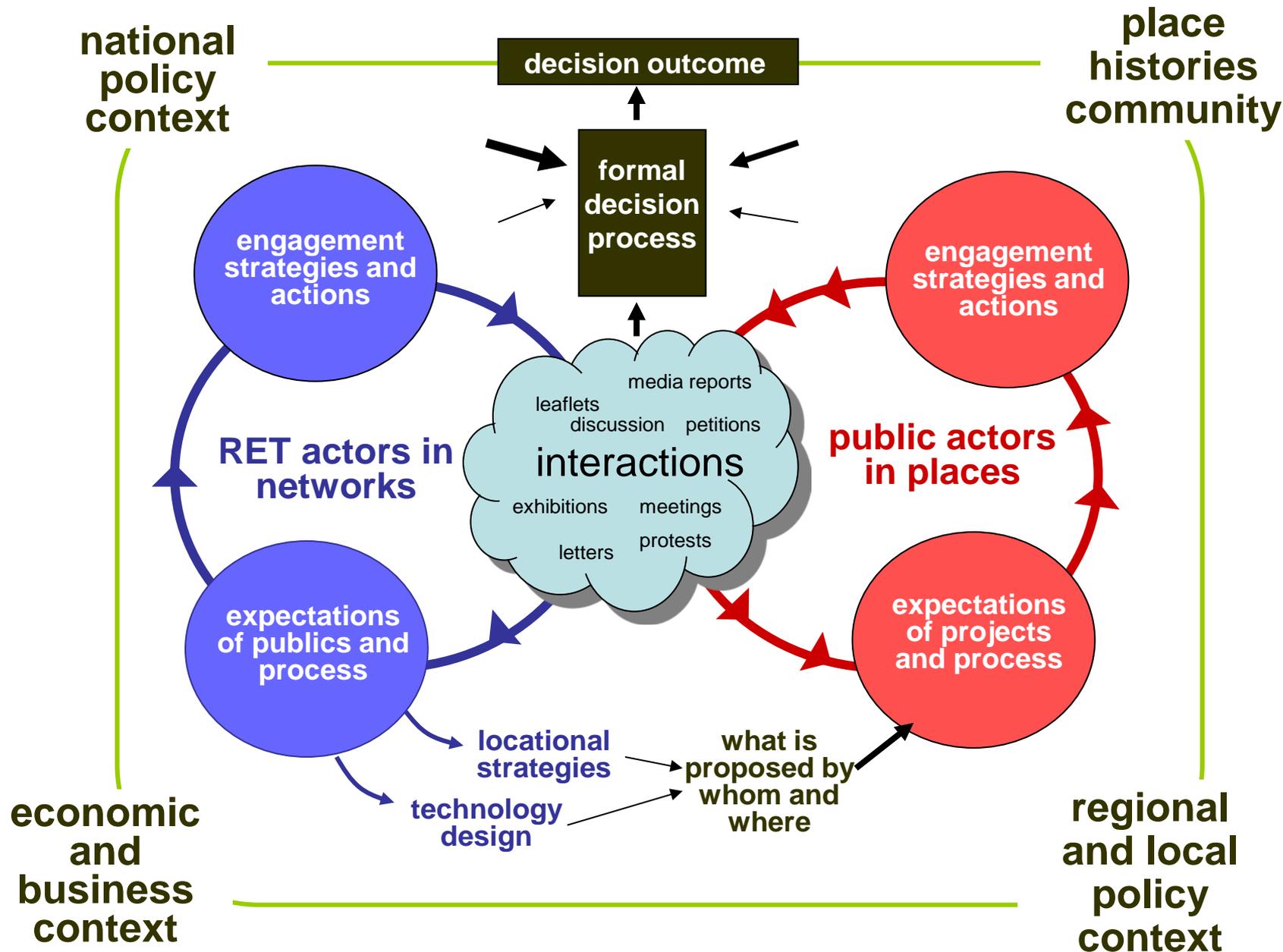
Ignoring or actively responding to a proposal

Taking a position on whether the proposal is a good or bad idea

Interpreting what, if anything, this could imply for you and for the locality

Becoming aware of a development proposal

In social context



- **A general descriptive (partly analytical) framework – not predictive (what will) or prescriptive (what should)**
- **Complex sets of processes, dynamics and interactions**
- **Large scale developer-led development projects ... different in other modes of implementation?**
- **Scope for more work with this framework**

to explore its (continued) validity

to add more into it?

longitudinal research

maybe to identify points of intervention

http://geography.exeter.ac.uk/beyond_nimbyism/