Green Concerns Collide:

Discourses, Truth Claims and Power Relations in Solar Park Developments in the Comunidad de Valencia, Spain

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PROGRAMME

- Introduction to the research & cases
- Theoretical framework
- Results
  - Cases
  - United resistance
- Discussion & conclusions

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Introduction

- Fieldwork 2021 – July 2022 - final covid year/start of Ukraine
- 8 months of research, fieldwork and Spanish exams
- Guest researcher at UPV, under Carles Sanchis-Ibor (UPV & UV)
- Evidence of resistance agains solar park development

- 8th/9th month: student assistant at academic consultancy course of my own master
  → additional case (Albaida).

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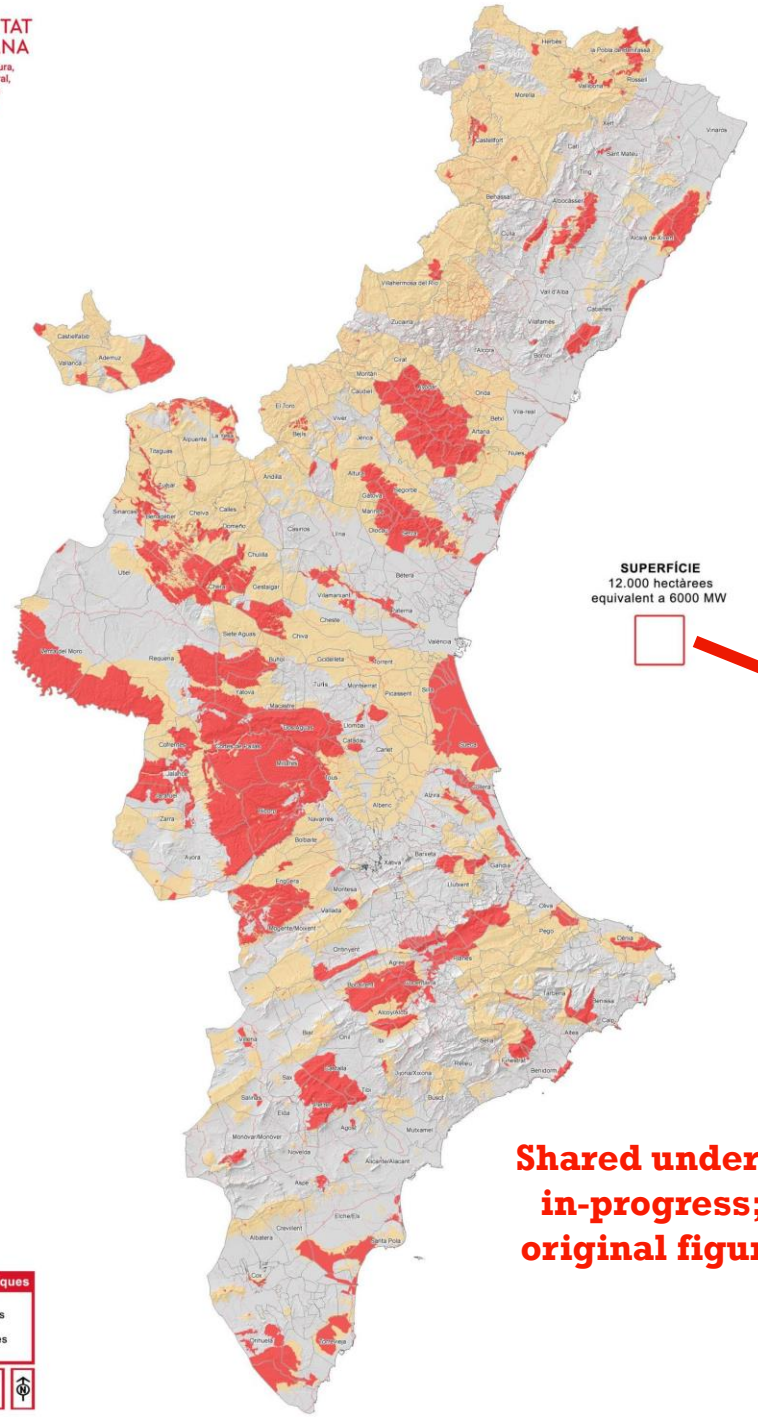

Introduction

- Decree-law 14/2020 sought to comply with national (and by extension European) renewable energy goals for 2030 (and 2050)
- Included a map: reducing all Valencia's diverse landscapes (lifescapes, habitats as well) to a 2D landscape with 3 flavours
- Large-scale, quick development, as well as their modus operandi, had caused resistance

The mission: 12.000ha or 6000MW by 2030

Not compatible: no solar development here

Under conditions: solar development is possible, but under certain conditions

No conditions: solar development is possible

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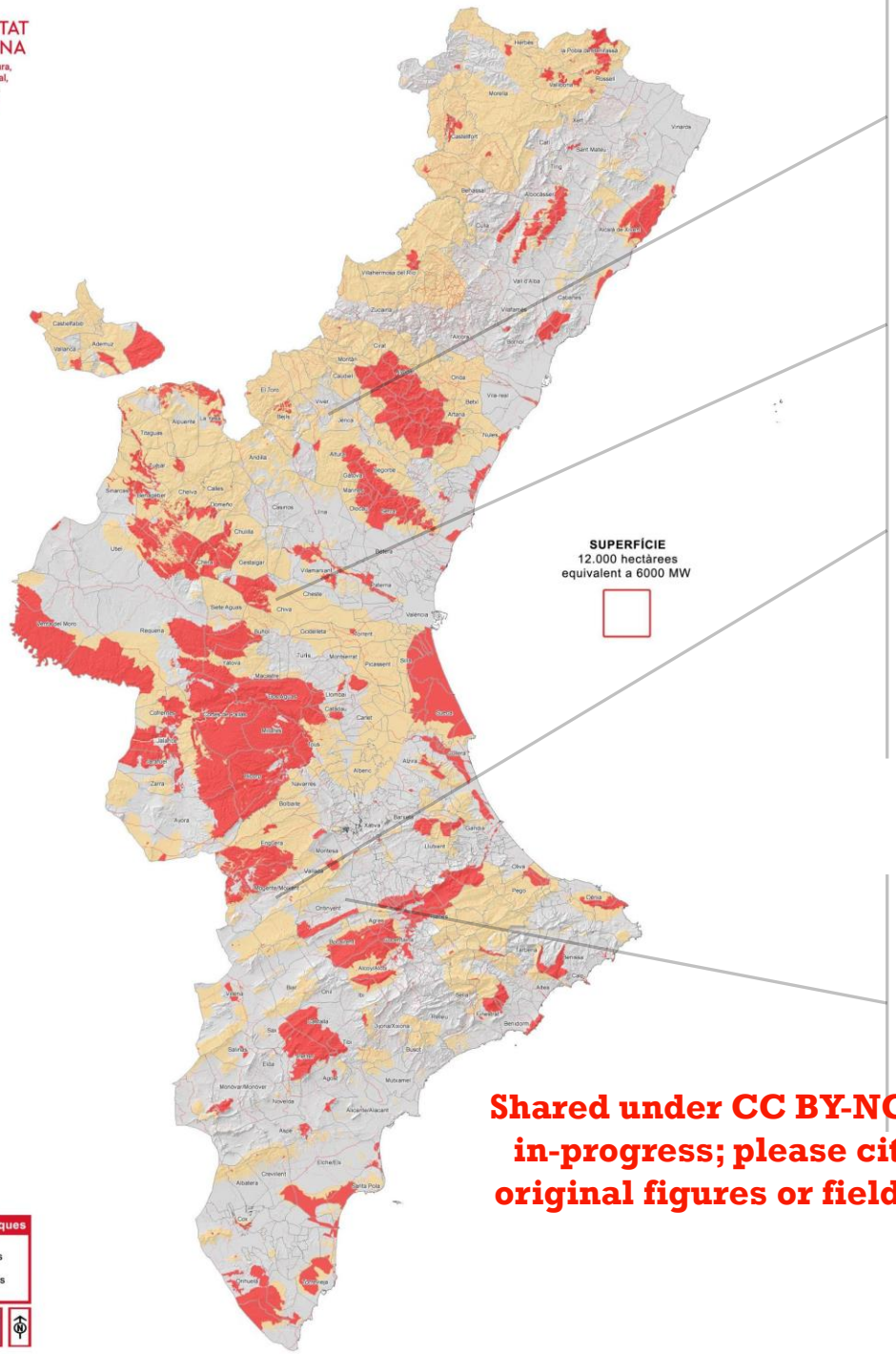




MSc Thesis, link



Wilzing et al., 2023, link



Jerica-Viver, Castellón

Plans for 49.967 MW

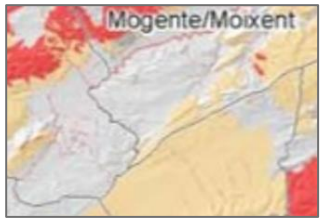
Area: 64 ha



Chiva, Valencia

Plans for 250 MW

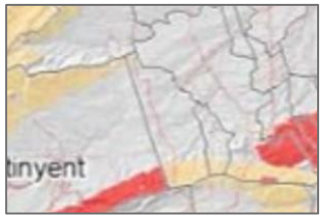
Area: 395+348 ha -->742-750ha



Terres dels Alforins

Plans for 120 - 150 MW estimated

Area: 170-200 ha estimated



Vall d'Albaida

Multiple plans, total 241 MW

Area: 398 ha

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Incompatible, Under conditions, No conditions

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Foucauldian discourse analysis: an x-ray image of the energy transition
- **Power** is relational, and operates through **discourses** that produce **truth claims** and a regime of truth.
  - Truth claims determine what is deemed legitimate, scientific or true
- **Governmentality/ the conduct of conducts** - conducts (behaviour) moves the behaviours of actors through rationalities (e.g. the map with 3 options)
- **Green grabbing** and sacrifice zones – appropriation of land resources justified by green imperatives. This produces **sacrifices zones**: the marginalisation of rural areas through ecological, social and economic externalities that benefit urban elites and private investment
- ''Where there is power, there is resistance'' – resistance takes shape through counter-conducts
  - ''Renovables sí, pero no así'' – yes to renewables, but not like this





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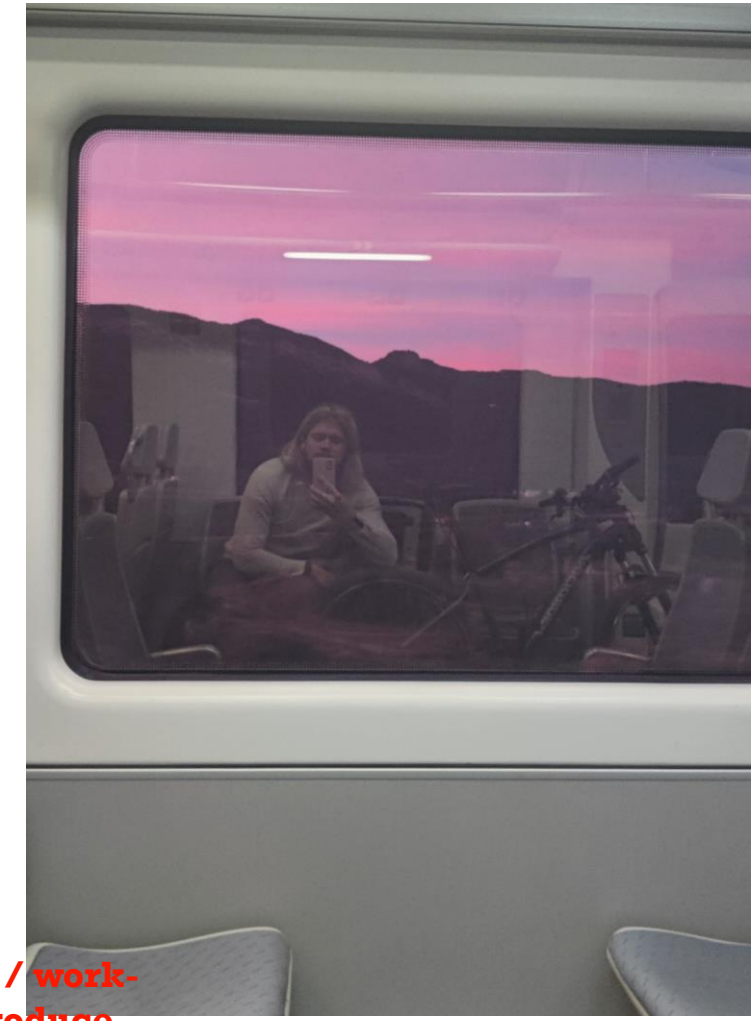
DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

- Cases selected: diversity in locations/landscapes while accesible by train from Valencia
- Data collection: 17 semi-structured interviews
  - Mayors, Secretary of Valencia Env., civil society organisations/members, farmer cooperatives, land owners
  - No solar companies
- Document analysis (environmental impact assessment, official documentations)
- Discourse is more than written words: news articles, social media posts (tweets, instagram), posters, pamflets, and a protest song were analysed.
- Theory-informed coding in Atlas.ti



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Results: socio-economic realities and the battle for/over the landscape

- ‘Green concerns collide’: different ‘green’ discourses are employed for ‘green’ objectives
- Dominant conduct by Valencian Government, Solar investors and companies: solar as the rational way out
  - Valencia endowed with solar potential and vast countrysides
  - Solar = uninevitable solution for climate action, economic development and energy dependency
- DL 14/2020: economic development over climate

"This generation must be definitive to ensure that renewables guarantee a clean, green ecosystem and that they also guarantee employment and a robust social state. And we have to do it. We will do it out of ethics, efficiency, conscience and decency.“

-- Ximo Puig, president of the comunidad of Valencia

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Results: governmentality through economic pressure

- The countryside of Valencia has been dealing with low margins, rising costs for inputs as labour and fertilization, as well as an ageing –rural-population with a lack of succession
  - Fragmented, abandoned lands
- Fertile soil for solar development:
  - Local real estate agents approach land owners for a petition
  - Once enough acres are combined for a park of around 49.98, a subsidiary buys the plan → proces of speculation and selling → plants constructed (or not)
  - They offer **1200-1500 per ha per year** for **20-25 years**
  - For many retiring/retired farmers a pragmatic choice for retirement
  - But even competible with margins on conventional agriculture

‘’it’s a lottery ticket” - Retiring farmer in Jerica talking about his pre-contract

‘’now another crop grows electricity here” - Farmer in Terres dels Alforins about a small piece of infertile land

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Results: power-knowledge, the concealment of impact

- Solar companies discuss their plans solely in MW (capacity) or total households (that would receive/consume electricity)
  - Avoids hectares to reveal scale and impact on landscape
  - Decree-Law 14/2020 incentivises fragmentation of plans (under 50 MW)
- Civil society organisations highlight the extent and impact on the landscape





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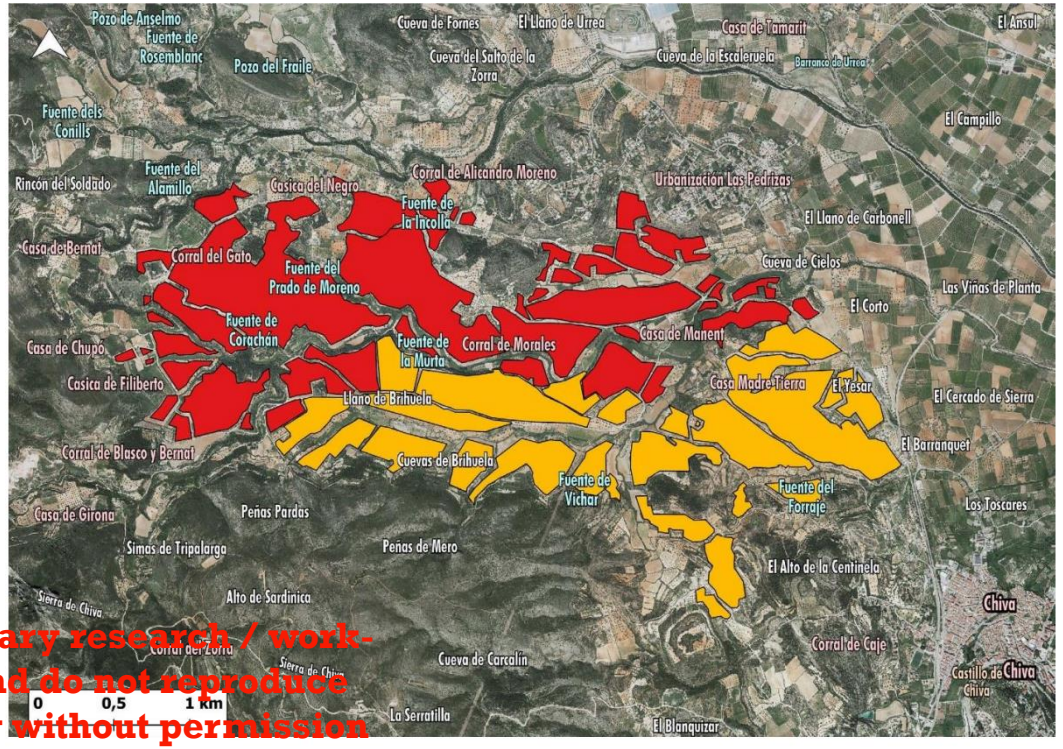
Results: Chiva

- FalckRenewables (later JP Morgan)
- Largest park (together 750 ha)/ 250 MW
- Corruption at the Water Users Association
- On land ‘’under conditions’’, but on the edge of largest National Park of Valencia
- Counter-conducts: equate themselves with life, green, and a lively countryside, while painting renewable energy and renewable energy infrastructure as harbingers of death
- Mayor leads the resistance of local associations





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Results: Terres dels Alforins – a battle over identity

- Resistance lead by group of bodegueros (wine farmers) that had invested in enotourism for the past 2 decades in Terres dels Alforins
- Landscape discourses as trademark: Farmer's sell landscape in a bottle: solar development on fields of wheat in the valley would ruin the patchwork landscape, their food experience and endanger livelihoods
- Examples of extortion of wheat farmers
- Resistance:
  - Opinion pieces with strong, war-like terms
  - ''enocide'', ''invasion'', ''foreign investors'' ''Norwegian funds''
  - Inviting secretary and officials of tourism, photo opp with farmers, officials and a statement that Terres dels Alforins should not be touched (per Tourism)

''Your land is yours, my land is mine, but the landscape is for everybody'' – wine farmer TdA







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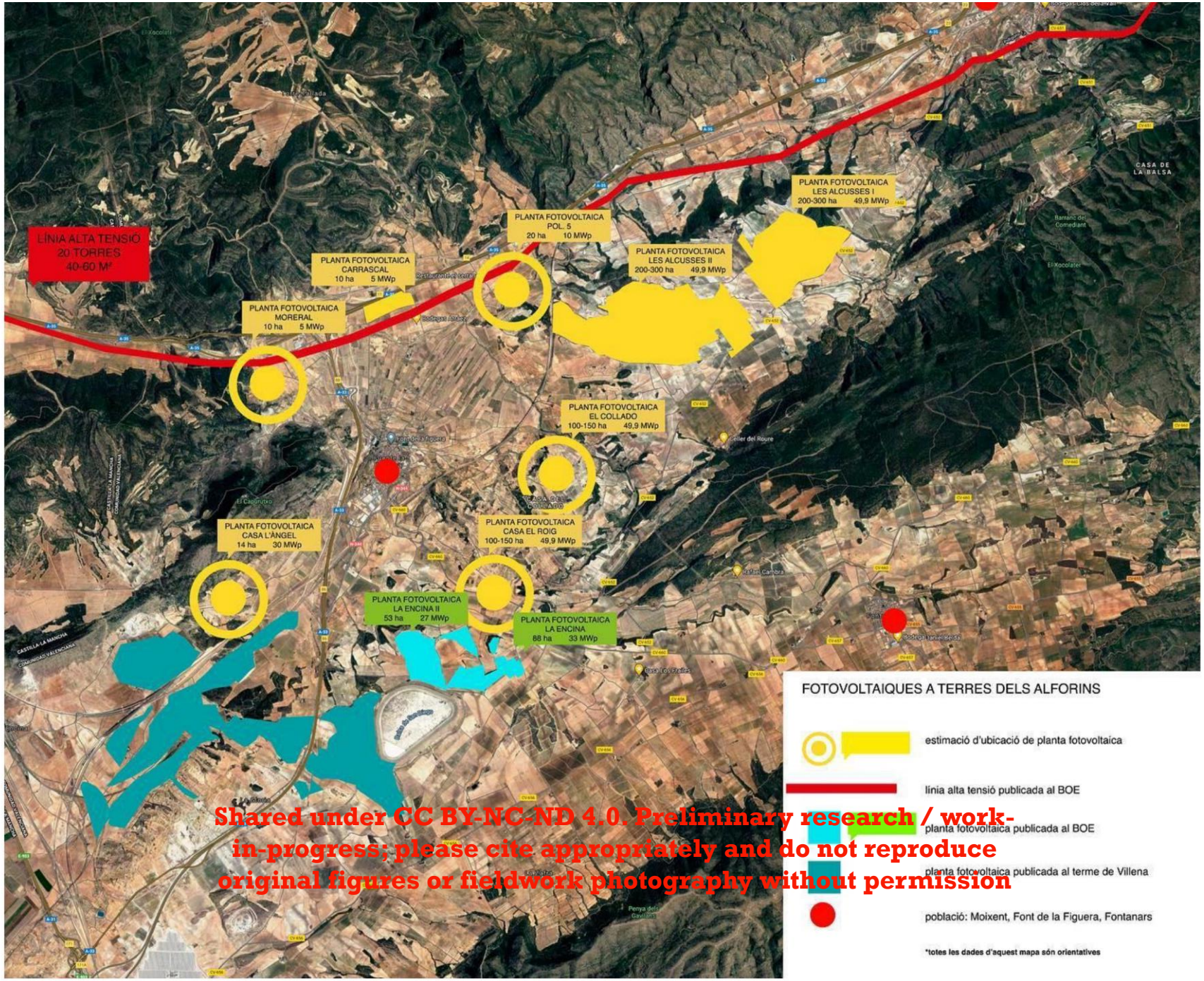

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Results: Jerica-Viver

- Almond/horticulture area, however: low profitability (negative margins), lack of sucession
  - Unproductive lands that cannot be modernized
- Coopearative leading the resistance
  - Protecting the agricultural future of the area
  - Cannot compete with offers of solar companies/ real estate agents
  - Limited budget to buy land for the cooperative
- *Friction example*: director farmer cooperative and family lands
- ‘’A good farmer’’ should resist the ‘’siren song’’ of real estate . A good farmer knows better.
- Cooperative: propose renewable energy, highlighting own panels, but rejecting the way parks are developed now on ‘valuable’ lands

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Rural development is not about building by destroying what already works. Renewable energies deserve to be treated as the great hope for the future that they are.

Losing irrigated land is neither renewable nor responsible. Removing productive fields is neither renewable nor responsible. Threatening biodiversity is neither renewable nor responsible.

We urge all administrations to protect high-value agricultural territories where established agri-food projects exist and where so much wealth and culture have been created.

#Viver #NotRenewableNorResponsible #DignifiedAgriculture#MediterraneanAgriculture360º #CooperationMatters #TheFlavorOfTheTerritory #WeOnlyAskForRespect#RenewablesYesButNotLikeThis

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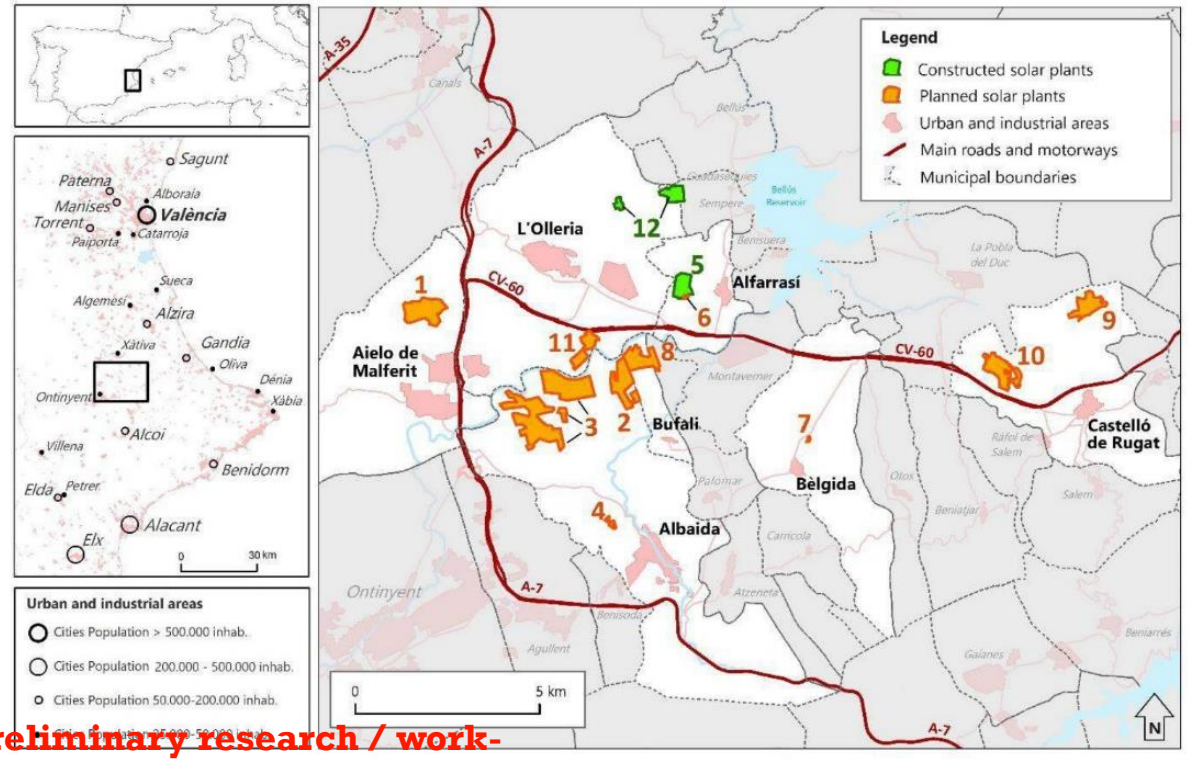
The case of Albaida

- Not part of thesis → another framework (Sovacool, 2021)
  - Enclosure - land appropriation under green guises
  - Exclusion – local communities have limited say in the processes and decision-making
  - Encroachment – landscape polution/ resource extraction
  - Entrenchment – power structures and inequalities get consolidated in the structure and new reality



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The case of Albaida

- Solar companies prepared for interview
- Municipalities get paid a canon
  - Additionally promised: sports facilities and other public works
  - Education for locals that want to enter renewable energy industry
- Plans fragmentated over municipal lines (who's responsible?)
- People in resistance in Albaida: issue with municipality as much as solar companies
  - Resist claims of socio-economic benefits, and argue that the benefits of solar parks will only end up at the investors, not inhabitants



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Power = resistance

- Dominant conduct: fragmentation and exclusion
  - Through different real estate agents
  - Speculative buying of plans
  - Staying under 50 MW per plan
  - Individual approach: divide and conquer
- Counter-conduct: unification and inclusion
  - Renewables yes, but not likes this
  - Renovables sí, pero no así
  - Rhetoricly powerful, challenging current regimes
  - Broadening resistance across territories, organisation type and scale/focus. (solar and wind, for example)



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Power = resistance

- Valencian coordination: La Coordinadora per la Ubicació Racional de les Energies Renovables (CRPRE) – ‘’’rational placement’’
  - More than 55 organisations, from local scouting to hunter’s association to environmentalists.
- National scale: Aliente - Alianza Energía y Territorio
- Demand/ counter-conduct:
  - Rational placement
    - Solar development should not go at the expense of lands and landscapes that hold a high social or cultural value.
    - Antropogenic areas prefered, such as industrial areas and roofs
    - However, ‘rational’ remains undefined
  - Decentralised, self-sustaining energy communities as alternative (the así)



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Conclusions and discussions

- Solar park development through market incentives is embraced by Valencian Government as solution to the climate, energy (independence) crisis, and rural development
- Local resistance question these green motives, and introduce their own green motives (biodiversity, agricultural value, rural dignity)
- Yet solar parks are also welcomed: retirement/economic relief for marginalised rural population
- Using Foucault as lense, the energy transition of Valencia reveals a political process that is produced by, and reproduces, socio-economic inequalities under the guise of green energy
- Discourse, counter-conducts and alternative truth claims have effect: park development is halted (Chiva, JV, TdA).
  - Opening up fora for discussions on their alternative energy model: decentralized and commonly owned-managed.
- RE technology offers a unique historic opportunity to break with entrenched power inequalities reproduced by centralised fossile fuel energy production

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Questions and discussions

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