

Article

Energy Transition Narratives in Spain: A Case Study of As Pontes

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Abstract: The energy transition is one of the most important processes of the last decade in Spain, affecting all aspects of life (social, political, economic and demographic). Its main objective is to eventually replace the fossil-fuel-based energy matrix with renewable energy sources to avoid climate change and meet sustainable development goals. This transition has affected a large number of population groups and institutions in carbon-intensive regions such as As Pontes, who are the main stakeholders in this process. These stakeholders have generated different narratives around the implementation of decarbonization policies and their short- and long-term impacts on the local population and the territory. These narratives affect the acceptance and pace of implementation of decarbonization measures and policies adopted by national and regional governments. Based on a qualitative analysis of published material (press articles, policy reports published by central and regional governments, reports published by environmental groups, financial institutions and large companies), this article first identifies the different stakeholders involved in the decarbonization process and maps them according to their power and interest in the energy transition process and then highlights the prevalent energy transition narratives, with their impact on the pace of the energy transition in Spain, focusing on the case of As Pontes. The results show that the narratives propagated by different stakeholders have a great impact on the acceptance of the decarbonization policies and measures adopted by the central government and the pace of the energy transition in different parts of Spain, including the region of As Pontes.

Keywords: energy transition; carbon-intensive regions; narrative approach; stakeholder mapping; As Pontes



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1. Introduction

Energy transitions are often described as processes in which a dominant energy source or group of energy sources are challenged and eventually replaced by more efficient and sustainable energy sources [1]. Similarly, the ongoing energy transition is a process of transformation from the current energy system, based on the use of fossil fuels, to a new energy system based on renewable sources, such as wind, solar and hydro, on a sustainable basis. Theoretical contributions on energy transition are varied; for some it is a gradual change in the way an economy generates, supplies and consumes energy [2,3], while for others, energy transition implies transformations in the economic activities of a society based on the abandonment of certain energy sources and the incorporation of new ones, all over a long time horizon [4]. Others explain it as a structural change in the energy system addressed at two levels, technical and political [5].

The recent energy transition responds to new needs and demands arising from the medium- and long-term effects of climate change and the impacts of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Its main objectives are to reduce carbon emissions, increase energy security, promote interconnection between users and producers, and meet the sustainable development goal of affordability of clean energy for all [6]. This transition is expected to generate more welfare for societies, ensuring that the resulting energy system is more inclusive and

sustainable, and thus has fewer negative environmental impacts and externalities. The ongoing energy transition also has a strong political dimension. As Bulkeley and Castán [7] argue, there is also a power play in the politics of managing the transition, especially in relation to who decides when and how to intervene. There are various (sometimes contradictory) arguments and positions for or against the implementation of energy policies, and numerous constellations of actors can be counted behind each argument and position—be it technical, which refers to the intensity and speed regarding the clean energy stakes; or political, which refers to who makes the decisions and defines the rules and regulation of the transition process.

In all transitions, there are some winners and some losers. The energy transition underway in Spain also affects a large number of population groups and institutions, which support or resist the closure of large carbon-intensive industries. The main supporters of decarbonization measures are renewable energy advocates and environmental groups, who describe this transition as the only opportunity to ensure the sustainability of the earth's systems for life on earth. In contrast, the main critics are the people whose livelihoods depend on industrial activities heavily dependent on fossil fuels. There are also some political actors on both sides, who use this transition to promote their political agenda and please their constituents. Equally, there are some financial institutions that see this transition as an opening to new sources of investment and long-term profits. All these stakeholders create and propagate different narratives around the equity and economic viability of the energy transition, which in turn affect the direction and pace of the energy transition in different regions. As prevailing narratives have a huge impact on the implementation of decarbonization policies, it is important to study the prevailing narratives around the energy transition to identify the key factors that can accelerate the pace of the transition and increase its acceptability among different groups in a region.

In the last decade, several studies have focused on the impact of dominant narratives on the framing, implementation and evaluation of energy policies [8–10]. Some studies have focused on the role of narratives in understanding sociotechnical transitions [11], in promoting action on climate change [12] and in determining the acceptability of different energy sources, including nuclear energy [13,14]; and others have focused on actions related to improving energy efficiency [15] and energy security [13]. In Spain, there is a lack of studies on the emerging narratives around the energy transition and their impact on the implementation of decarbonization policies in different regions. This paper attempts to fill this gap by identifying the different actors and the narratives propagated by them and their impact on the direction and pace of the energy transition in Spain, with a special focus on the carbon-intensive region of As Pontes. Our main objective is to identify the different stakeholders and map them according to their power and interest in the energy transition process and then to highlight the prevailing energy transition narratives and their impact on the pace of the energy transition in As Pontes.

The selection of As Pontes, a municipality in the province of A Coruña in the autonomous community of Galicia, as a study area is justified by the fact that it is at the forefront of the energy transition and is facing the closure of its main industrial unit, the La Central thermal power plant, which is the largest thermal power plant in Spain and the biggest source of income and employment in the region. The As Pontes coal mines were phased out in 2007, and since then the thermal power plant has been fueled by imported coal. The thermal power plant is owned and operated by the company ENDESA. Due to the rising price of carbon emissions and the lack of competitiveness with other energy sources, the company decided to phase out this plant in December 2019. This decision has created many concerns and uncertainties about the future of this city and the surrounding region, whose entire economy has depended on this mega-project for the past five decades. It has become the focus of debate among different stakeholders about the positive and negative effects of this transition and its impact on the local population and economy. The lessons learned from As Pontes can be used to study the impacts of narratives on the pace of the energy transition in other industrial regions at national and EU level.

This article consists of five sections. The second section focuses on the conceptualization of the energy transition and its various aspects in the context of the As Pontes case study in Spain and provides a theoretical framework on the use of narratives in energy transition research and social science in general; Section 3 provides a detailed overview of the data sources and methodology used in the article; Section 4 presents the current state of the energy transition in Spain; Section 5 presents the identification and mapping of the main actors according to their power and interest in the energy transition process and highlights the different narratives around the energy transition and their impact on its pace in As Pontes; and finally, Section 6 opens the discussion and presents some conclusions.

2. Energy Transition and Narrative Approach

Energy transitions are fundamental processes in the evolution of human societies: they drive and are driven by technical, economic and social changes [16]. In current literature, “energy transition is defined as a shift from one dominant energy resource- or set of resources-to another” [17]. Arlota and colleagues [18] emphasize that energy transition addresses how humanity uses energy for its needs and reconciles it with social, environmental and economic interests. According to the International Renewable Energy Agency, the ongoing energy transition is “a pathway towards transforming the global energy sector from fossil-based to zero-carbon in the second half of this century. At its heart is the need to reduce energy-related CO₂ emissions in order to limit climate change”.

The main objective of the current energy transition is to reduce dependence on oil and coal and to promote renewable energy sources. To achieve the objectives of the EU’s New Green Deal, each member state must reduce GHG emissions; increase the penetration and share of renewables in its energy mix; increase energy efficiency and security; ensure availability at competitive prices; raise public awareness; and change the behavior of households and businesses. In this way, the energy transition combines the perspective of sustainability, energy security and economic competitiveness (Figure 1). Regarding the first, the Paris Agreement shows the commitment of all member states to reduce GHG emissions [19]. The carbon pricing mechanism is used to cap emissions, and member states are allowed to trade their surplus carbon allowances. From an energy-security perspective, the problem of securing energy supply can be solved through diversification of primary energy sources, which in turn depends on the existence and availability of resources and the size of demand. In other words, it analyzes the challenge from the perspective of making the transformation of a system compatible with an increase in energy demand, derived from higher rates of economic growth and a process of greater and more intense urbanization of the population. It also incorporates management issues, intermittency and variability of supply, as well as environmental perspectives, as challenges. Finally, the third element is economic competitiveness, which is subdivided into two dimensions, the micro- and the macroeconomic. The microeconomic dimension concerns energy prices and the consumption and production activities of households and businesses. However, the macroeconomic dimension focuses on the capacity to mobilize financial resources capable of associating investments and combining decisions to invest in new energy technologies, and also on their capacity to influence the development of the energy transition.

From the point of view of transition policy making and implementation, energy transition processes can be classified as top-down or bottom-up. Top-down transition processes refer to those proposals promoted by international institutions or national governments, i.e., they belong to the category of flows derived from political and economic power. The successive initiatives launched by different UN agencies, multilateral organizations and national governments and parliaments are included in it. Thus, the energy transition aims at changing the energy matrix and combating climate change. It acts primarily on the environmental dimension, and highlights the need for reduced and low-carbon consumption [20]. It is therefore a centralized decision-making mechanism. However, bottom-up transition processes [21] are defined from the territories, which seek to link the environmental system and human systems, based on local developments. They defend territory/place and

economies of proximity and emphasize that goals tend to meet needs. Their advocates are integrated into currents such as degrowth [22] or postdevelopment [23]. They are based on the concepts of common goods and highly participatory forms of governance; and they draw attention to the processes of energy grabbing, very much along the lines of land or sea grabbing. In this sense, energy transition processes are seen as phenomena of energy liberalization, stimulating debates on changes in ownership and the new roles to be played by both regulatory and competition policies, when it comes to eliminating energy dependence on oil and reducing the contribution to global warming [22]. In short, it is a multidimensional approach in which redistribution and equity components in the territorial and social dimensions predominate, and in which broad mobilization and lobbying of multiple stakeholders is required. Dominant narratives play an important role in facilitating top-down or bottom-up processes by affecting the general perception of policies and measures of different stakeholders.

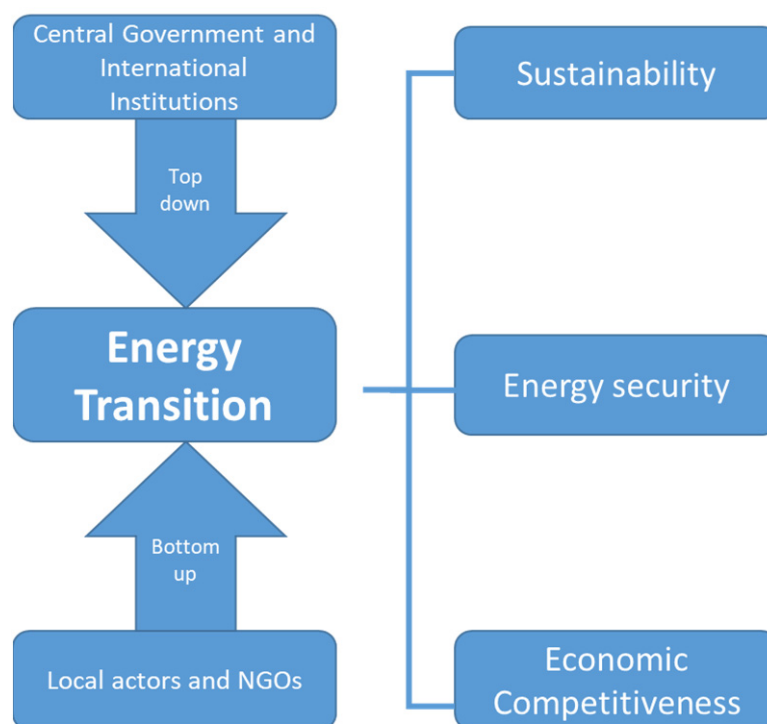


Figure 1. Three main aspects of ongoing energy transition.

Narratives, which are commonly perceived as sequences of connected imagined or real events, are important for humans, who perceive and interpret the world through stories [24]. In other words, narratives are socially constructed stories [25]. They bring together qualities of language- and communication-oriented approaches and build on and influence notions of thematic and discourse frames [21]. They are assumed to “play a central role in the way individuals process information, communicate and reason” [26]. They connect people and make sense of events and issues [12] and enable audiences to make sense of complex issues [26]. They provide a unique type of informal evidence, a different perspective and a way to connect different stakeholders [27]. At the local level, narratives are very effective in improving local understanding of different issues [28]. Because of all these qualities, narratives can play a very important role in perception building and social movement building. Over the last decade, the use of narratives and stories has become a more common practice in the social sciences, especially in energy and climate change research [9,10,21,29–33]. Due to its role in creating and positioning new narratives of transformations towards sustainability, civil society can be conceptualized as a driver of transitions towards sustainability [34]. In the social sciences, narratives “are often used

to denote non-fictional and constructed, formal and official cases, e.g., what institutions generate and reflect in the general discourse on a topic" [29].

In explaining the impact of dominant narratives on the energy transition, [32] explains that "political, economic and social decisions tend to follow dominant narratives. Narratives create realities. They are imbued with ideas that influence behavior and shape cultures. Narratives influence what we see and think, how we see things and how we behave. They create cultural, institutional and infrastructural dependencies". According to Holmes [35], narratives play a fundamental role in the process of creating energy futures, being the bridge between the past, the present and the future. Soutar and Mitchell [36] highlighted the importance of the narrator within the energy transition, as "the development of narratives of engagement is increasingly important for actors seeking to describe and prescribe futures in which they play key roles...".

In Spain, the narratives that are playing an important role in the creation of energy futures are mostly told by central government, industry groups, political parties, policy makers at EU level, trade union leaders, frontline environmental activists and researchers. These narratives are tailored to the interests of different interest groups and define the energy transition from different perspectives. In this paper, we will focus on the dominant narratives around the energy transition in Spain and their impact on the pace of implementation of decarbonization policies.

3. Materials and Methods

In this paper, we used 135 text documents (Table 1) related to the decarbonization policies adopted by the central and regional governments to mitigate the impacts of the decommissioning of La Central, the largest coal-fired power plant in Spain. These include press articles, resolutions, policy documents published by the European Commission, the central government (MITECO) and regional governments (Autonomous government of Galicia and Municipal council of As Pontes), leaflets published by trade unions and environmental groups, reports published by ENDESA and other financial institutions and interviews with key actors published in different newspapers. All these documents show the perspectives of different stakeholders on the implementation of decarbonization policies in Spain, with special reference to the region of As Pontes.

Table 1. Type of documents collected for the text analysis.

Text Category	# of Texts
Policy documents published by the national government (MITECO), regional and local governments.	16
Press releases and policy documents published by Endesa Company and other business groups.	22
Policy documents published by the European Commission.	11
Press releases and PR campaigns launched by the regional and national political parties in Spain.	4
Press releases and flyers published by trade unions.	14
Press releases and PR campaigns launched by environmental groups.	15
News articles on the decarbonization process in As Pontes and other parts of Spain.	34
Policy documents published by different financial institutions.	8
Interviews of key stakeholders published in newspapers.	11
Total number of documents	135

Source: own elaboration.

These documents were selected through an extensive internet search with the help of a list of keywords (Table 2), during the period from September 2021 to February 2022. These keywords were selected based on an in-depth literature review and the frequency of occurrence of some specific words in multiple documents. They refer to the stakeholders

involved in decarbonization and energy transition processes, the regions affected by this transition and the keywords related to the impact of decarbonization policies.

Table 2. List of keywords used for text material search.

Keywords Related to Stakeholders	Keywords Related to “Decarbonization” or “Energy Transition” Processes	Keywords Related to Region	Keywords Related to Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MITECO and La Central in As Pontes - National government’s policy on decarbonization - Xunta de Galicia and phase-out of La Central - Municipal council of As Pontes and closure of La Central - Endesa and La Central in As Pontes - Trade unions and phase-out of La Central - Transporters Association - Small businesses and phase-out of La Central - Greenpeace on the closure of La Central - Environmental groups on the closure of La Central - Financial institutions and decarbonization. - Political parties in Galicia and decarbonization. - Gender and decarbonization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decarbonization in Spain - Closure of mines in As Pontes - Closure of La Central thermal power plant in As Pontes - Energy transition - Just transition - Renewable green energy - Wind and solar plants - Hydrogen project - Energy storage and carbon capture techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As Pontes - Ferrol - A Coruña - Galicia - Spain - Southern Europe - European Union 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Energy security - Energy poverty - Rise in fuel prices - Economy of As Pontes and Coruña - Worker’s Protests in As Pontes - Job loss and unemployment in As Pontes - Youth Migration from As Pontes - Environmental impact of mines and power plant - Loss of revenue

During the data collection, we focused on events related to the decarbonization process that occurred during the last decade. During this period, the Spanish government decided, for the first time, on the progressive closure of all uncompetitive coal mines in Spain (2011); inaugurated the As Pontes freshwater lake by refilling the coal mine shaft (2012); signed the Paris agreement (2016); decided to close all coal and nuclear thermal power plants (2018); and accepted the proposal to decommission the La Central thermal power plant submitted by ENDESA in December 2019. All these events are major milestones in the decarbonization of the Spanish economy and have helped to construct different narratives on the impact of the energy transition in carbon-intensive regions (Figure 2).

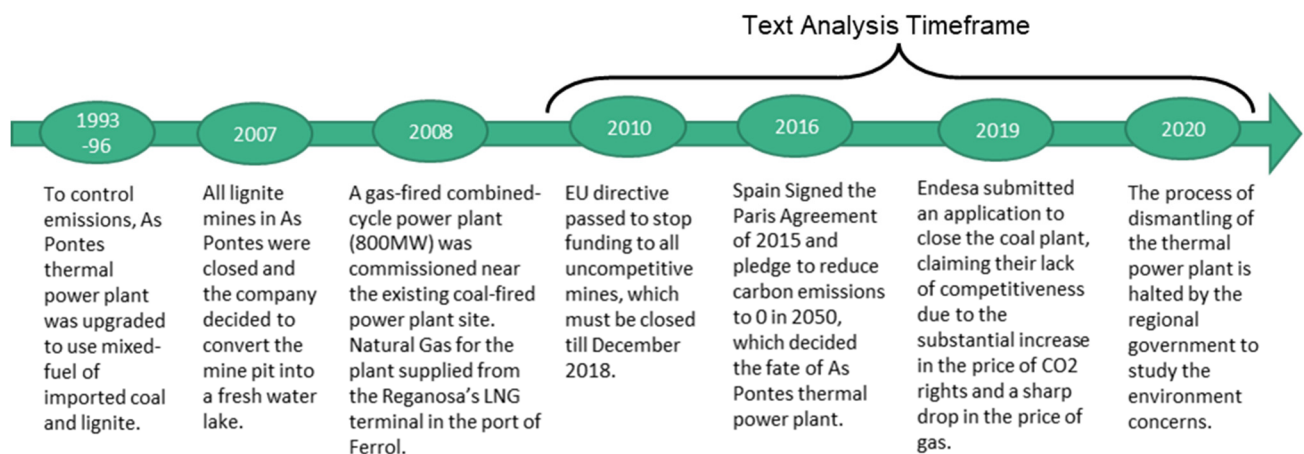


Figure 2. The chronology of the decarbonization process at As Pontes, Spain.

In terms of methodology, we analyzed all textual material with MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software, which served as a hermeneutic tool to identify individual stories and trends, which were then assembled into collective narratives. All textual material was coded using a mixed deductive–inductive approach [37]. First, the texts were coded with a set of primary codes to identify the different actors and their individual perspectives on the energy transition. We then searched for the different narratives propagated by the different

stakeholders and discovered the overlaps and mismatches between the different narratives and their impact on the acceptance of decarbonization measures and the pace of the energy transition in Spain.

4. The Current State of Energy Transition in Spain

Since the 1970s, Spain has based its economic development on the use of fossil fuels. Hydroelectric power was replaced by classic thermal power from coal and oil, which led to a high dependence on fossil fuels. As a result, in 1990, the proportion of fossil fuels in the total energy mix was 93%, making Spain one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gases in the EU, especially carbon dioxide, the main cause of climate change. In the 1990s, Spain started its decarbonization process and put some control over the country's biggest polluters, the coal-fired power plants. All plant owners were obliged to use modern technology to reduce emissions. Some of them switched to imported coal and gas, which are less polluting and cheaper compared to local lignite. In the first decades of the 21st century, Spain accelerated the decarbonization process and started to phase out all large coal mines in the country. Following European Commission guidelines, in 2010 the Spanish government ordered the closure of all uncompetitive coal mines, which due to demands from mine owners and trade unions was finally implemented in 2018. In 2020, the share of nonrenewable energy sources in the total energy mix decreased to 82%. Likewise, by 2020, the share of renewable energy sources (hydro, wind, solar, geothermal, biomass, biofuels and renewable waste) in the total electricity generation increased to 44%, of which 21.4% was wind power [38]. This is a great transition in terms of moving away from fossil fuels; however, much work is still needed to decarbonize the transport and household sectors. The ongoing energy transition has created new challenges to maintain regular supplies of affordable and clean energy from renewable sources and to create new jobs for those affected by the closure of carbon-intensive industries.

In Spain, the energy transition is a top-down process. All major decisions regarding the decarbonization of the Spanish economy are taken by the central government. The Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (MITECO) is responsible for framing and implementing decarbonization policies to facilitate the energy transition and promote the use of renewable sources. The key elements of the energy transition in Spain include: (a) promotion of energy-saving behavior, increased energy efficiency and greater public awareness to curb energy wastage; (b) promotion of processes to replace fossil fuels with renewables, at competitive prices to guarantee their use—the aim is to increase the share of renewables in energy production by increasing consumer confidence; (c) investment in new technologies and equipment that enable more efficient energy use, without generating negative environmental externalities; (d) the introduction of environmental taxation to internalize the external costs of greenhouse gas emissions and other atmospheric pollutants, in a new context of Green Tax Reform; (e) helping groups negatively affected by the closure of economic activities heavily dependent on fossil fuels, and protect the territory affected by the extraction of fossil fuels; (f) formulating and implementing new economic, legal, administrative and regulatory frameworks to achieve the sustainability of production and service systems.

Following the guidelines established in the Paris Agreement, in February 2019 the Spanish Government approved the Strategic Framework for Energy and Climate, through which measures will be implemented to facilitate the change towards a sustainable and competitive economic model that contributes to curbing climate change. This Strategic Framework is structured into three pillars: the draft Climate Change and Energy Transition Law (LCCTE), the draft National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan (PNIEC), and the Just Transition Strategy (ETJ). The first two elements of the framework significantly increase Spain's climate ambition. The LCCTE proposes that the electricity system should be 100% renewable and greenhouse-gas-neutral for the whole economy by 2050. The PNIEC proposes a 23% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (compared to 1990) and an increase in the use of renewable energy sources to reach 42% of total energy consumption

by 2030, which is double the figure in 2020. The third element of the framework, the ETJ, seeks to maximize the social gains of the green transformation and mitigate the negative externalities of this ecological transition. These three elements guide the transition processes and help to put in place strategic frameworks to ensure the processes of decarbonization of the economy, the definition of a roadmap for the next decade and a Just Transition Strategy to ensure that workers and territories benefit from the new opportunities arising from this transition and to minimize the negative effects and repercussions through accompanying measures and economic reactivation.

The philosophy of the energy transition processes proposed in Spain is mainly based on the implementation of low-carbon models that are developed in a way that helps to optimize the benefits of the transition (i.e., creating employment) and minimize the negative repercussions that may arise in those activities that must be subject to transformation and reconversion. With regard to the Just Transition Strategy, new tools are defined to favor the sector's own transformation dynamics, the closure of facilities and the application of territorial reactivation measures. The Just Transition Agreements, which are both a Territorial Action Plan and an Economic Action Plan, are signed by the central government and the representatives of the regions affected by the closure of carbon-intensive industries. These agreements are committed to the maintenance and creation of substitute employment activities, the fixation of the population and the diversification and specialization of economic activities, in coherence with the new socioeconomic context, taking advantage of the endogenous resources of the territory as well as attracting new investments to the affected territories. For the correct application and monitoring of Just Transition Agreements, the Spanish government has created the Institute for Just Transition, which provides technical and financial support for the development and implementation of decarbonization policies.

5. A Case Study of as Pontes, Spain

As Pontes de García Rodríguez is located in the interior of the province of A Coruña. It has an area of 259.37 km². Over the last two decades, the population of As Pontes has gone from 12,477 inhabitants in 1998 to 10,168 in 2020, an 18.7% decline in the total population. The proportion of dependent population (children from 0 to 16 years old and people over 65 years old) has increased from 30.7% in 1998 to 36.4% in 2020. This increase in the dependency ratio is mainly associated with the emigration of young people and ageing. The average age of men and women has risen from 38.9 and 40.2 years in 1998 to 47.1 and 48.8 years in 2019.

Since 1975, As Pontes has been famous for its thermal power station, La Central, which is the largest of its kind in Spain. This thermal power plant is owned and operated by ENDESA. It has a conventional coal-fired thermal power station, consisting of four groups and with a gross installed capacity of 1468.5 MW (which is the one affected by the closure) and a natural gas combined-cycle thermal power station, with a gross installed capacity of 855 MW. Initially, this power plant was fueled by lignite extracted from local coal mines, and after the closure of the mines in 2008, it was fueled by imported coal, which was brought to the power plant from the port of Ferrol by trucks. For the last five decades, the thermal power plant has been the largest source of income and employment for the local population and an economic engine for the development of this region. The closure of the power plant will have drastic consequences for the economic stability of the region. In a recent study, Pardo et al. [39] quantified that the effects of the initial closure of the plant, in the absence of any substitute activity, would be an annual loss of EUR 144.27 million, a reduction of EUR 77.53 million in intermediate consumption, a decrease of EUR 66.74 million in relation to gross value added, a reduction in salary payments of EUR 33.60 million and a loss of real estate and business income of some EUR 33.14 million. In terms of employment, the closure of the As Pontes thermal power station would result in the loss of 1178 jobs, including 108 direct jobs, 327 indirect jobs and 743 auxiliary jobs. Almost a quarter of the active population of As Pontes would be affected by the closure and the number of unemployed would be multiplied by three. In addition, the closure

would mean that only 32.65% of the active population would keep their jobs in the town while 34.06% would be unemployed. The closure of the plant would reduce the financial capacity of the municipality. Its income would be reduced by around EUR 3.8 million per year, which represents a 45.5% decrease in total taxes before the closure. This cut would have a direct negative impact on the functions carried out by the local institution in terms of support policies for social, cultural and sporting purposes.

The central government in collaboration with the local administration of As Pontes is developing an action plan to mitigate the effects of the thermal power plant closure on workers, the local economy, energy security and environment. A Just Transition Agreement will be signed to ensure that no one feels left behind in this transition. It will take into account the perspective of all stakeholders and formulate policy measures to avoid adverse impacts of the energy transition by investing in job creation, skills development and reindustrialization using local natural resources. For the development and implementation of any decarbonization policy, it is important to identify the different stakeholders and their power and interest in the decarbonization process.

5.1. Identification and Mapping of Stakeholder

The ongoing energy transition process affects (directly or indirectly) a large number of people, firms and institutions, which are the main stakeholders of the energy transition process in As Pontes. The term stakeholder comes from organizational theory and strategic management. In his study, Freeman [40] defined stakeholders as any group or individual that is affected or can affect the achievement of an organization's objectives [41]. However, Eden and Ackermann [42] consider that the origin of stakeholders is related to the diverse nature of what they can demand. In this paper, we have followed two parallel streams of research to identify the main stakeholders: theoretical evidence from the relevant literature and empirical evidence from the textual material collected on the energy transition in As Pontes. The qualitative analysis of the text material helped us to identify the main stakeholders in As Pontes region, including government bodies (EU Commission, central government of Spain—MITECO, regional government of Galicia and municipal council of As Pontes), producers of energy (ENDESA, Reganosa, EDP), trade unions (plant workers, transport employees, auxiliary workers etc.), consumers of energy (general public, small businesses) and other affected groups (environmental groups, political parties, financial institutions, women and other social organizations) (Figure 3).

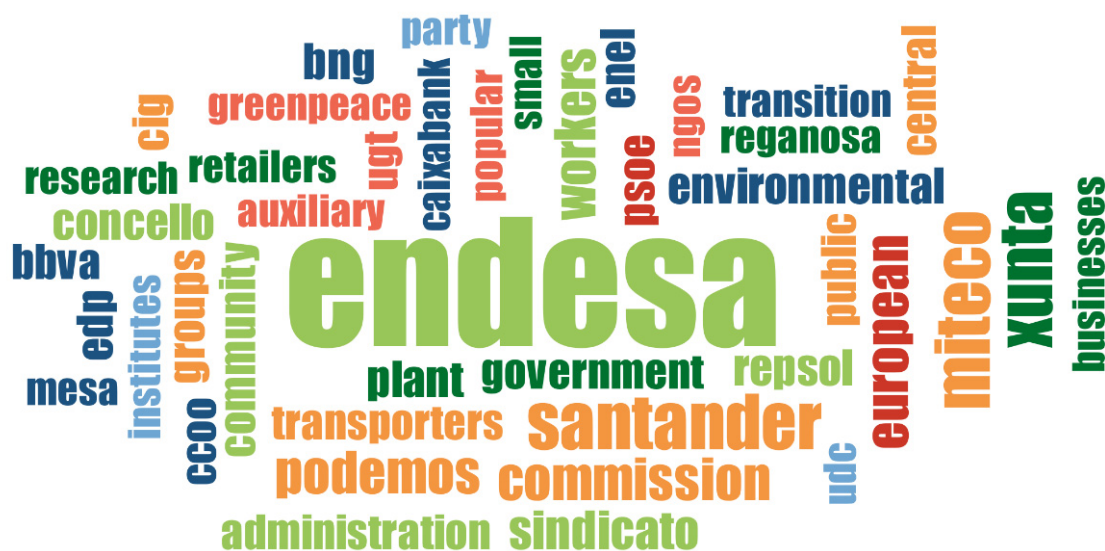


Figure 3. Different stakeholders involved in ongoing energy transition process in As Pontes, Spain. Source: text material collected June 2021 to February 2021. Note: The size of the words represents the frequency of occurrence.

All these stakeholders have varying levels of power and interest in the decarbonization and energy transition processes. Using Freeman's [40] 'Power–Interest Grid', we can classify all stakeholders into four categories (Table 3). In the first category, we include stakeholders with high power and high interest. These are the European Commission, the central government (MITECO), the company Endesa and financial institutions such as Santander, BBVA and CaixaBank. As mentioned above, the energy transition is a top-down process in Spain; therefore, all of these stakeholders are active at the national level and frame policies that affect transition in the As Pontes region. The first important stakeholder in this category is the European Commission. As a member of the European Union, Spain is obliged to follow EU climate plans and to implement EU rules and regulations related to environmental protection. Most decarbonization policies and measures in Spain depend on direct funding from the European Commission, which makes them an important factor in the energy transition process with great power and interest. Secondly, the central government of Spain has the maximum power and interest in the energy transition and decarbonization process in Spain. All major policies regarding the phasing out of carbon-intensive activities and support for transition regions are framed and implemented by the Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge (MITECO), which is a central government body and is headed by the Vice-President of the Government.

Table 3. Stakeholder mapping on the basis of interest and power in the decarbonization process in As Pontes region, Spain.

		INTERESTS	
		<i>High Power/Low Interest</i>	<i>High Power/High Interest</i>
POWER		Trade unions (UGT, CCOO) Right-wing political parties (PP)	European Commission (EU) Central government (MITECO) Big business (ENDESA) Financial institutions (Santander, BBVA, LaCaixa)
		<i>Low Power/Low Interest</i>	<i>Low Power/High Interest</i>
		General public Local small businesses Community associations	Regional governments (autonomous, provincial and municipal) Environmental groups (Greenpeace, Galicia sin Carbon) Research and investigation institutions

Source: own elaboration, with the help of text material collected June 2021 to February 2022.

The third important player with great power and interest is ENDESA, owner and manager of the As Pontes thermal power plant. ENDESA is the largest industrial group in the region. For decades, it has exploited a large amount of local resources (coal, water, land and air) and has employed a large part of the local population, which makes it an important stakeholder with a lot of responsibility for recovering the land and water resources contaminated during coal extraction, transportation, storage and combustion, and for relocating workers who become unemployed after the closure of the plant. Finally, the fourth important stakeholders with great power and interest are the financial institutions, such as Santander, BBVA, CaixaBank and Repsol Foundation. These financial institutions have major interests in the energy sector in Spain. They are influencing the decarbonization process by cutting funding for nonrenewable energy sources and shifting the budget towards large renewable energy projects. They are also encouraging their private investors to transfer funds to renewable energy projects.

In the second category, we include stakeholders with high power and low interest, such as trade unions (UGT, CCOO, CIG) and conservative political parties (PP). Trade unions are very strong organizations in the mining and power-generation sectors in Spain. In the past, on the occasion of the closure of the coal mines in 2007, they succeeded in defending the rights of the miners, and now they are pressuring the central government and the company for the outplacement or early retirement of the workers laid off by the closure of the thermal power plant. The unions show little interest in the decarbonization

process and certainly do not want to sacrifice the welfare of plant workers for the sake of environmental protection. Conservative political parties such as the PP, which is the main opposition party in the central government and the ruling party in the autonomous community of Galicia; and Vox, which is the third-largest far-right nationalist political party in Spain, have also shown little interest in the decarbonization policies implemented by the central government. On the contrary, they are mobilizing protests against the closure of industrial units and criticizing the government for mismanaging the transition funds and putting the carbon-intensive region's economic growth and the country's energy security at risk.

In the third category, we include stakeholders with little power and a lot of interest, such as regional governments (autonomous, provincial and municipal), environmental groups (Greenpeace) and research institutes (UDC). In Spain, regional governments have little power to affect central government policies, but they are very interested in the decarbonization process affecting their population, territory and resources. The regional governments of the As Pontes region (Xunta da Galicia and Concello de As Pontes) are lobbying the central government to obtain the lion's share of funds from the European Commission to mitigate the adverse impacts of the closure of the thermal power plant and to restructure the economies of the affected regions. Similarly, environmental groups have limited power and a strong interest in the decarbonization process. Environmental groups, such as Greenpeace and Galicia un Futuro sin Carbono, organize protests against the delayed closure of thermal power plants, which are the main source of CO₂ and other toxic gas emissions in the region. They have limited power to influence government policies, but they continue to inform the government about the environmental damage caused by the thermal power plants in the As Pontes region. Finally, research institutes, such as the University of A Coruña, are also very interested in the process of developing and implementing decarbonization policies for the As Pontes region, but have limited power to influence government decisions. Several university research groups have raised questions regarding the impacts of decarbonization policies on the local economy, population and territory, and have assisted regional governments in presenting evidence-based arguments to the central government regarding the impact of the closure of the thermal power plant.

In the fourth category, we include stakeholders with little power and little interest, such as small local businesses and community associations. In the As Pontes region, local small businesses have little power and interest in shaping decarbonization policies. They are limited to bearing the adverse impacts of the closure of thermal power plants, which leads to the loss of customers for them. Likewise, there are no significant community associations protesting or supporting decarbonization policies and energy transition in the region. There is a total silence in the published material on gender issues related to this energy transition.

All these actors create and disseminate different (often contradictory) narratives around the energy transition, sometimes based on false or incomplete information, which help people to unite and organize protests or support for energy transition policies, which in turn affects the pace and direction of the energy transition in Spain. Some of the main narratives are discussed in the following section.

5.2. Narratives around the Energy Transition

There are multiple narratives propagated by different stakeholders to support or resist the ongoing energy transition in As Pontes. These narratives are used by different actors to promote their interests and to tilt national policies in their favour. Broadly speaking, we can divide the narratives into two categories, the first one supporting the energy transition process and the implementation of decarbonization measures as it is, and the second one criticizing the way energy transition measures are designed and implemented. Some of the main narratives in the first category are:

Energy transition is a great business, social and industrial opportunity

This is the dominant narrative regarding the energy transition propagated by the central government, the European Commission, Endesa and financial institutions. Proponents of this narrative see the energy transition and the growth of renewable energy sources as a *win-win* scenario that will create new green jobs, increase investment opportunities in green businesses, produce regional development and generate clean energy and a safe environment for all.

Spain's central government is the biggest proponent of this narrative. According to the long-term strategy of the Ministry for Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (MITECO), which is responsible for developing and implementing transition policies in Spain, "the energy transition is a great business, social and industrial opportunity for the Spanish economy" (ELP_MITECO, 2020, P. 6) and "Spain has the potential to become one of the European countries driving this energy transition" (ELP_MITECO, 2020, P. 7). MITECO strives to accelerate the energy transition process by facilitating the closure of carbon-intensive industrial units and supporting green energy projects. At the same time, they have made Just Transition Agreements with the regions affected by the closure of industrial units, to ensure that no one feels left behind in this transition and that the territories do not suffer depopulation. MITECO, while showing its concern for a just and inclusive energy transition, affirms that "the major transformation implied by climate neutrality will only be feasible if it is done with equity and social justice, in equality between women and men, with special attention to those who are most vulnerable and to the eradication of energy poverty". (ELP_MITECO, 2020, P. 9). With this narrative, the central government is trying to convince Spaniards about the drastic policy measures it has taken in recent years regarding the closures of coal mines and thermal and nuclear power plants, which on the one hand are affecting the livelihood of a large number of households and the labor market in carbon-intensive regions, and on the other hand affects energy security and affordability for industries and households. In general, a large majority of people believe in this narrative, but high energy bills and inflation are forcing them to change their minds about the implementation of energy transition measures and creating a sense of insecurity and neglect. Rising energy prices, together with the COVID19 crisis, have decreased industrial competitiveness and household savings in Spain, which is affecting the standard of living of the Spanish middle class.

Secondly, the European commission (EC), which is the main funder of decarbonization projects in Spain, also supports this narrative and has endorsed the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience plan (2021) proposed by the Spanish government [43]. The plan consists of 112 investments and 102 reforms, which will be supported by EUR 69.5 billion in grants. Forty percent of the plan will support the climate objectives and 28 percent will foster the digital transition. The EC assessment report states that "the reforms and investments in the plan will help Spain become more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions". (*Spain's recovery and resilience plan _ European Commission*, P. 1: 38). When talking about the Spanish recovery and resilience plan, the president of EC said: "I am delighted to present the European Commission's positive assessment of Spain's €69.5 billion recovery and resilience plan. This plan will deeply transform Spain's economy, make it greener, more digital, more resilient". Similarly, the Executive Vice-President for an Economy that Works for People said: "Spain's recovery plan sets an ambitious roadmap to boost the country's economic performance and to reinforce its social cohesion, using €69.5 billion in EU grants to deliver a broad set of reforms and investments. The plan places a welcome focus on jobs creation and on the next generation, with measures to address youth unemployment, enhance the provision of skills relevant for the labour market and improve the business environment and public administration. It will put in place large-scale investments to help citizens, businesses, firms and the public administration embrace the digital and green and transitions". Lastly, the Commissioner for Economy said: "With its strong focus on the green and digital transitions and its comprehensive programme of reforms and investments, the Spanish plan is as ambitious as the situation demands. This is a unique opportunity not only to

strengthen the country's recovery from the pandemic but to build an economy that is more socially just, more sustainable and more dynamic. In short, an economy that better serves all segments of Spanish society". (*NextGenerationEU- European Commission endorses Spain's 69.5 billion recovery and resilience plan*, P. 2: 910). All these statements by senior EC officials show their support for the proposed plan and reinforce the narrative propagated by the central government.

Thirdly, the largest business groups in energy sector in the As Pontes region, such as Endesa, Reganosa, EDP and Naturgy, also support this narrative. All these groups are the main energy suppliers in Spain. In the recent past, they used fossil fuels to generate energy, which made them the richest companies and the biggest polluters in Spain. Now, they are planning to benefit from the European funds to switch to renewable energy and clean up their image as responsible and sustainable companies. Endesa's CEO states that "the Next Generation funds represent a great opportunity for the recovery of the economy". (*Endesa ubicará en As Pontes un centro logístico y de operación*, P. 3). Endesa has proposed Futur-e projects [44] for regions with thermal power plants pending closure to mitigate the impact of the transition towards a zero-emission-generation model. The company's CEO claimed that "Endesa is engaged in an energy transition process that will allow it to evolve towards an emission-free energy model, through the decarbonisation of the economy and a commitment to renewable energy" (*Futur-e plans for a fair transition-Endesa*, P. 1: 235). The Futur-e plan is an initiative based on dialogue with local communities to find a sustainable future for the areas occupied by the plants that have ceased to operate. Its aim is to find solutions and projects beyond the limits of the energy sector, based on social, environmental and economic sustainability criteria that serve to create shared value with the community and the environment of these industrial sites.

Regarding the impact of this narrative on the pace and direction of the energy transition in the As Pontes region, we can conclude that during the last few years this narrative has encouraged people to support the decarbonization policies adopted by the central government, which in turn helped the government to accelerate the process of closing mines and thermal power plants. With this narrative, the central government, financial institutions and Endesa have managed to convince a large number of Spaniards about the benefits of this transition.

Green growth and sustainability narrative

Another dominant narrative around the energy transition is the 'green growth and sustainability' narrative, which presents it as the only hope for ensuring the survival of life on earth. They refer to the latest IPCC report on climate change [45] to justify their concerns about the severity of climate change impacts around the world. This narrative is championed by environmental groups, left and centrist political parties, and community associations. Environmental groups active in the As Pontes region, such as Greenpeace, Galiza un Futuro sen Carbón, Verdegaiia and Petón do Lobo, play an important role in raising awareness of the adverse effects of large fossil-fuel-based industrial units and contributed to the creation and propagation of the 'green growth and sustainability' narrative. The latest report on decarbonization by the Sustainability Observatory noted that "Repsol, Endesa and Naturgy are the most polluting companies in 2020. All three companies have plants in the province of A Coruña and together they have produced 26.3 million tonnes of environmentally harmful gases" (*Repsol, Endesa and Naturgy, on the podium of the most polluting companies*, P. 2: 1220). This demonstrates the importance of phasing out of these industrial units in order to meet the climate targets set by the Spanish government for 2030 and 2050.

In 2018, the thermal power plant of La Central in As Pontes was the largest emitter of CO₂ nationally and the seventeenth most-polluting in the European Union (*Cambio climático_ La otra cara de la transición ecológica*, P. 1: 1872). In its report on thermal power plants in Galicia (2006), the environmental group Greenpeace raised several problems of air, water and soil pollution from the As pontes thermal power plant. In explaining its impact on health, the association stated that "the As Pontes coal-fired power plant is

responsible for some 1800 premature deaths across Europe every year” (*Greenpeace 2006, P 2*). It has also criticized the financial supports and subsidies that energy companies receive from central government in order to be able to continue their activities. In this regard, the head of Greenpeace’s climate change campaign said, “Polluters not only don’t pay, they get paid for it. It is not possible to fight climate change and continue burning coal, Members of the European Parliament know this and should commit themselves to saving the climate and not the coal-fired power companies” (*ACTION-Greenpeace projects at the coal-fired power plant, P. 1: 3411*). In addition to CO₂ emissions, the environmental group Petón do Lobo denounced Endesa for polluting the water of the river Eume and supported the fine imposed on the company by the local government, “The fine is good and is a step forward, but we cannot limit ourselves to Endesa paying it and nothing else happens. It is not enough to determine administrative responsibilities, because there may also be criminal responsibilities, for the alleged commission of crimes against the environment and against public health, and, of course, political responsibilities, because the Xunta has known about this company for years and has done nothing to prevent it (*Contaminación del río Eume_ Multa de 1,9 millones a Endesa, P. 3*).

The environmental platform Galiza, un Futuro sen Carbón blames the denialism of Endesa, public institutions, political parties and trade unions, which “despite climate warnings, did everything possible to maintain the activity indefinitely and did not want nor knew how to prepare for the current scenario” (*As Pontes does not want to pay the price for the transition disaster, P. 2: 1260*). This attitude of neglect delayed the implementation of decarbonization policies and support measures, which is affecting the people whose livelihoods are at stake with the plant’s closure. In turn, it raises questions about the Just Transition of carbon-intensive regions, which is creating an anti-environmentalist narrative and pitting environmental groups against trade unions by giving space to the “jobs versus climate change” narrative.

Left and centrist political parties, such as Galicia en Común, which is an offshoot of Unidas Podemos in the center and the Socialist Party of Galicia (PSdeG-PSOE), also support this narrative. They follow the policies adopted by their central leadership. All of them “have identified the process of energy transition based on renewable energy as the main response to climate change and the need and opportunity to give the citizens the possibility of being part of the energy transition by entering the energy sector on a parity with large enterprises” (*PSOE, Ciudadanos and Unidos Podemos committed to renewables-E, P. 2: 377*). The proponents of this narrative succeeded in raising awareness of the need for energy transition to save the world from the adverse impacts of climate change. They helped the central government justify its drastic decisions to close large thermal power plants and accelerate the process of decarbonization.

Sun and wind are the new oil

The third main narrative in favor of decarbonization policies and the energy transition is “sun and wind are the new oil”. Proponents of this narrative portray the energy transition as an opportunity to attract more private and public investment in the renewable sector and reap long-term benefits. The main proponents of this narrative are financial institutions, including major banks and investment groups with large stakes in the energy sector. Recently, due to the expected closure of carbon-intensive activities under the various decarbonization policies, all financial institutions have started to shift funds away from the fossil fuel sector to renewables and have encouraged companies to move towards green energy solutions. All major banks see this energy transition as an opportunity to expand their sustainable business model. The CEO of Banco Santander said: “Climate change is a global emergency. As one of the world’s largest banks, with 148 million customers, we have a responsibility and an opportunity to support the green transition, and encourage more people and businesses to go green. There is much, much more to be done, but today’s commitments are important steps on the journey”. (*Santander, P. 1: 1755*). In a recent report, the Santander group expressed its commitment towards decarbonization and energy transition: “By 2030, Santander will align its power generation portfolio with

the Paris Agreement. As part of this, the group will stop providing financial services to power generation clients with more than 10% of revenues dependent on thermal coal and eliminate all exposure to thermal coal mining worldwide" (*Santander, P. 1: 103*).

Likewise, when speaking about the energy transition, the BBVA chairman stated that "the energy transition represents a tremendous opportunity to generate growth and well-being" (*BBVA, P. 2: 4484*) and that "Spain has a competitive advantage in the energy transition" (*BBVA, P.1: 1767*). He stressed that "sustainability is a long journey and an opportunity for SMEs to be more competitive, both in the current context and in future crises. Consumers are increasingly aware of the importance of sustainability. Investing in sustainability is not an expensive decision, it is a smart decision, and not an expensive one", (*BBVA, P.2:1444*). BBVA's Global Head of Sustainability states that "Decarbonization, in particular, and sustainability, in general, represent the greatest transformation in the history of humanity and provide huge business opportunity for BBVA and its shareholders". Regarding the situation of electricity generation in Spain, which is the main contributor to emissions, the BBVA chairman said that "the electrification and the decarbonization of electricity is a key aspect. We are going to multiply the installed capacity by three. Spain is very competitive in this because it has the natural resource-the 'new oil', which is the sun and the wind" (*BBVA, P. 2: 10*). In addition to the EU funds, the BBVA bank has also shown its interest in bringing private and public investment to the renewable sector; in this sense the BBVA chairman said, "We need to get those funds to multiply with private investment. Private investment is the key factor behind long-term growth" (*BBVA, P. 2: 3395*). On the strategy for the future, BBVA's Global Head of Sustainability stated that "the acceleration in sustainable finance reaffirms our sustainability strategy. Climate change and the process of energy transition and decarbonization is the biggest business opportunity for banking over the next ten years. Such a large-scale transformation requires capital investments amounting to around 5% of annual global GDP. A key part of BBVA's strategy is to help its customers adapt to this new environment, not only by financing, but also by advising them in this transition" (*BBVA channelled 35.4 billion euros in sustainable financing in 2, P. 1: 726*).

CaixaBank, in line with its sustainability strategy and its commitment to zero emissions by 2050, is financing green hydrogen initiatives that will incentivize the overall transition towards decarbonization. *CaixaBank* has highlighted the importance of hydrogen in this ongoing energy transition, as a substitute for other fossil fuels with a high carbon content and as a means of storing energy produced through renewables. In 2021, CaixaBank joined the European Clean Hydrogen Alliance, an organization of the European Commission, to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy and achieve zero CO₂ emissions by 2050. The aim of the Alliance is to "promote and develop the production of renewable hydrogen as a catalyst for decarbonising in areas such as transport, industry, and other economic sectors needed to fulfil the commitments made by the European Union" (*CaixaBank_2021, P. 1: 590*).

Among the major financial groups, Fundación Repsol is one of the leading groups in the energy sector. In 2020, reinforcing its commitment to energy transition and society, Fundación Repsol acquired 11.29% of Hispaled, an insertion company with an innovative business project that generates a triple-positive impact on the people, the environment and the economy. This brings the number of companies in which Fundación Repsol participates as part of its triple impact investment strategy to six, boosting Spanish businesses (*Repsol, P. 1: 12*). The chairman of Fundación Repsol describes that "the investment [in the company Hispaled] represents an opportunity to drive the scaling up of a truly innovative company, which responds to the challenges of advancing a fair and inclusive energy transition" (*Repsol, P. 2: 320*).

The proponents of this narrative discourage new investments in the fossil fuel sector and try to convince private investors to invest in renewable energy projects. In this way, they try to accelerate the process of decarbonization of the Spanish economy and the energy transition. However, they have so far had little success in attracting private investment in

the renewable energy sector and most renewable energy projects remain heavily dependent on EU funding.

In contrast, narratives highlighting the shortcomings of this decarbonization process and criticizing the implementation of energy transition policies include:

Energy transition is neither Just nor Transitional

Proponents of this narrative describe the energy transition as an abrupt and unfair process, imposed on people living in carbon-intensive regions and consumers who are forced to pay high prices for energy. They claim that the energy transition, in its current form, is highly devastating to carbon-intensive regions and harms the interests of people directly or indirectly involved in carbon-intensive industries. The main proponents of this narrative are trade unions, small businesses, regional and local governments and the general public.

Firstly, the trade unions of the thermal power plant and transport workers are extremely unhappy with the way in which the transition policies are framed and implemented in As Pontes. The first major concern of the unions is the relocation of the plant workers to other provinces outside Galicia. Endesa had promised to reallocate the workers close to their homes, but is now failing to keep its promise. The workers' union representatives denounce that "more than 90% of the vacancies where the workforce will be relocated are outside the Galician community, so employment in the area around the municipality of A Coruña is not guaranteed". (*Endesa traslada al personal de As Pontes fuera de Galicia*, P. 1: 430). Similarly, describing the situation of the transport workers, the president of the Association of Coal Transporters and member of the Board of Directors of the Galician Federation of Transport denounced "We are mortgaged. Three or four months before announcing the closure, they ordered us to renew the vehicles to make them less polluting, telling us that Endesa was going to operate at least until 2040–2045. There are colleagues in a desperate situation". (*La central de As Pontes hace acopio de carbón ante la amenaza*, P. 3: 1956). Comparing the local situation in As Pontes with that of other EU countries and outside world, the trade union representative stated that "Why do we in this corner of Galicia have to pay for what they do in other parts of the world? Galicia does not have a surplus of emissions, our trees suck up everything that this power station releases into space. Germany pays and continues with coal, while in China they are setting up 170 power plants that are twice as big as this one" (*As Pontes no quiere pagar el pato del "desastre de transición"*, P. 4: 209). The unions also blame the public administration for their mismanagement of the transition process and affirm that "Endesa is guilty, but also the public administrations that consent to this disaster with promises and talk of just transition that does not materialize in nothing. [...] they urge the population to defend employment and the future of the region and demand a just energy transition" (*Endesa-As Pontes_ the unions warn of forced relocations*, P. 3: 0).

Local governments also support this narrative. They are also very unhappy with Endesa and the central government, which are mainly responsible for this transition process. The municipal councillor of As Pontes and the president of the regional government in A Coruña stated that "A private company [Endesa] makes its decisions and does not share them... it deceives the society to which it owes so much. It is not necessary to deceive society with a report full of falsehoods that only makes all the administrations and society itself angry, which has long perceived that Endesa's commitment to As Pontes and to Galicia can be summed up in a future wind plan with hundreds of wind farms that will be in the vicinity of the place where it is doing so much damage", (*El alcalde de As Pontes ve lleno de falsedades_ el informe de Endesa*, P. 1: 1323). He added that "the transition has been very disruptive and disruptive measures are needed to deal with it". (*Cambio climático_ La otra cara de la transición ecológica*, P. 1: 1403).

The leader of the opposition party BNG in Galicia explained, "This is not a just energy transition, but a pure and simple shutdown and we are facing a tremendous political irresponsibility that portrays the inability of both executives to manage a truly just energy transition" (*Ana Pontón visita la acampada de As Pontes y pide a la Xunta*, P. 2: 933). Speaking

about the new green energy projects proposed by Endesa and the central government, the mayor of Cerceda stated that “wind projects cannot be sold to us as re-industrialisation projects, because they only generate residual employment at local level. Furthermore, the Galician wind sector plan is obsolete. We need to reconsider the distance to houses and the particularities of each area. With regard to wind energy, the public interest cannot be allowed to be subjected to private interests that only see the territory as an opportunity for profit Above all, the well-being of neighbours, sustainability and social responsibility must be paramount” (*Cambio climático_ La otra cara de la transición ecológica*, P. 3: 1314). It shows the local administration’s concerns about the implementation of green energy projects, which are often sold as instruments of just transition in the region, but ignore the socioeconomic and environmental needs of the local population and do not provide economic stability.

Small and auxiliary companies also criticize the energy transition process for its neglect and the unfair distribution of European Commission funds for regional development. The work council of the auxiliary workers affirms that “if the closure decision materialises in June 2021, there is no alternative employment in the area, neither for the company’s own staff nor for the auxiliary staff”. (*Endesa trasladada al personal de As Pontes fuera de Galicia*, P. 3: 583). They also criticize the distribution of funds to large companies that in the past were dedicated to the coal industry and are now presenting themselves as pioneers of green energy. Small businesses feel neglected in this transition process. The coordinator of auxiliary companies of the Endesa thermal power plant in As Pontes carried out protests in front of the town hall of A Coruña “to make publicly visible the serious labour situation that the indirect workers of the factory as well as the coal transporters are going through”. They stated that the “public administrations after months of claims and protests have not achieved any solution, beyond empty words” (*El reto de la transición justa en As Pontes_ evitar la pérdida*, P. 1: 755).

This narrative has managed to convince a large number of workers at the plant and the local administration to protest against the implementation of decarbonization policies, without taking into account the interests of the local population. The protests registered by different groups have managed to delay the closure process of the As Pontes thermal power plant, which has slowed the pace of energy transition in this region.

Energy transition is misguided and costly

Proponents of this narrative portray the energy transition as a misguided and costly process that will lead to high energy prices, energy insecurity, energy poverty and frequent blackouts, which will negatively affect industrial growth and the country’s competitiveness in the global market. The main proponents of this narrative are the center and right-wing political parties, the general public and small businesses, which are ultimately paying the price for this transition. The recent rise in energy prices has accelerated inflation, hurting the savings of poor households and affecting the living standards of the masses. It has reinforced this narrative and negatively affected small middle-class households and small businesses.

The *Partido Popular*, a conservative political party in Spain, which is the main opposition in the central government and the ruling party in Galician regional government, criticized Endesa for not consulting them before the closure of the thermal plant in As Pontes and criticized the central government for an ‘unfair, chaotic and disorderly energy transition, which allowed the company to do whatever it wanted’ (*Endesa cierra la térmica de As Pontes (A Coruña) por la inviabilidad*, P. 10: 715). Speaking about the recent increase in the energy bills, PP representatives said that “month-by-month, lighting bills, heating bills, the cost of petrol and diesel, food, housing and transport just keep going up. The whole of society is suffering”, (*In Spain, soaring prices fuel growing social unrest—EURACTIV.*, P. 2: 88). Vox, Spain’s third largest political party, which is experiencing a surge in support, has capitalized on widespread discontent, especially in rural areas, accusing the government of being “a factory of misery that ruins the middle classes and the most disadvantaged” (*In Spain, rising prices fuel growing social unrest—EURACTIV.*, P. 2: 1475). Taking advantage

of rising fuel prices and the resulting food inflation, which is mainly due to increasing gas prices and war in Ukraine, Vox has propagated this narrative and blamed the central government's energy transition policies for this situation.

By highlighting the shortcomings of the ongoing decarbonization process, proponents of this narrative are attempting to slow down the process of shutting down large industrial projects. From the growing number of protests, we can conclude that to some extent, they have succeeded in convincing Spaniards of the adverse effects of the central government's decarbonization policies on energy security and affordability.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

With a detailed analysis of the textual material, we find that in Spain there is a broad consensus on the need for decarbonization, but there are conflicts over the implementation of decarbonization policies that negatively affect the pace of the energy transition. During the last decade, energy transition has remained a hotly debated topic in Spanish politics and society at large. This debate has focused on maintaining, upgrading or closing the main sources of carbon emissions in Spain, i.e., coal mines and thermal power plants, and meeting the sustainable development goal of providing clean and affordable energy to all. Since 2010, Spain has accelerated the decarbonization process and started phasing out all uncompetitive coal mines. Finally, all coal mines were phased out in 2018 and the process of decommissioning thermal power plants was also accelerated after the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2016. This energy transition from nonrenewable sources (especially coal and nuclear) to renewables (wind, solar and hydro) has a profound impact on regions and population groups, which were totally dependent on carbon-intensive activities.

The closure of the thermal power plant in the As Pontes region, which had the largest thermal power plant in Spain, has affected a large number of people and institutions in the region, who are the main stakeholders in this transition process. These stakeholders have different degrees of power and interest in the decarbonization process. Depending on their power and interest in the decarbonization process, we have classified all these stakeholders into four categories: (1) actors with high power and interest, which are the European Commission, the central government (MITECO), large companies (Endesa) and financial institutions (Santander; BBVA, Caixabank, etc.); (2) stakeholders with high power and low interest, which are trade unions (UGT, CCOO) and centrist and right-wing political parties (PP, Vox); (3) stakeholders with low power and high interest, which are regional governments (autonomous, provincial and municipal), environmental groups (Greenpeace, Galicia sin carbon) and research institutions (UDC); and (4) stakeholders with low power and low interest, which are the general public, small local businesses and community associations.

These stakeholders have created and propagated different narratives to support or resist decarbonization policies and the energy transition process. The narratives supporting the energy transition are: *"The energy transition is a great business, social and industrial opportunity"*, which highlights the social and economic dimensions of the energy transition; secondly, the *"green growth and sustainability"* narrative, which highlights the environmental aspects of the energy transition; and lastly, *"the sun and wind are the new oil"*, which shows the financial aspects of the energy transition. In contrast, the narratives that resist the energy transition are: *"the energy transition is neither just nor a transition"*, which highlights the social justice issues; and *"the energy transition is misguided and costly"*, which shows the mismanagement in the implementation of decarbonization policies. We can conclude that these narratives have a major impact on the pace and direction of the energy transition in Spain. Narratives that support the energy transition have helped the central government to implement drastic measures in relation to the phasing out of coal and nuclear power plants. Similarly, narratives opposing the energy transition have succeeded in mobilizing people against the government's policies and have initiated mass protests to criticize the closure of large industries and the increase in energy prices. This means that both high- and

low-power actors can play an ambiguous role both in supporting transformative energy transitions and also mobilizing civil society against sustainability transition.

All of these narratives are affecting the pace of the energy transition in the As Pontes region. In November 2021, despite the acceptance of Endesa's closure report, which they submitted in December 2019, the increase in the price of natural gas on the world market and the shortage of electricity in the country forced the central government to allow Endesa to start up two units of the As Pontes thermal power plant to cover the energy needs of households. This action delayed the decarbonization process in the A Coruña region and opened a debate on our dependence on fossil fuels and the economic viability of this transition. The recent aggression by Russia, the EU's largest supplier of natural gas, on Ukraine has aggravated the energy situation in many European countries. Rising energy prices have affected the budgets of many governments across Europe. Acceptance of coal has increased slightly, and many Eastern and Central European countries plan to delay the closure of coal-fired power plants to secure energy supplies and reduce dependence on Russian gas. In Spain, energy prices have doubled since the war began, leading to massive protests in the country. This price increase has strengthened the narrative against energy transition policies, and people are beginning to blame the central government's decarbonization policies for rising energy bills. Right-wing political parties, taking advantage of this critical situation, propagate the narrative that the energy transition is misguided and costly for middle-class households and that they are the scapegoat for this energy transition. The central government is trying to provide relief to vulnerable households by reducing the taxes on electricity; however, it is still unable to curb the rise in energy prices, which is eroding its credibility among the masses.

To get a large number of stakeholders to speak out in favor of the energy transition and convince them of its long-term benefits, the Spanish government should help vulnerable households and businesses with energy subsidies, negotiate with private energy companies to curb the increase in energy bills, invest more in renewable energy sources, create new job opportunities in the affected regions and support restoration projects in the affected territories. In the future, it will be interesting to see how the narratives propagated by the central government, the European Commission and financial and research institutions influence public opinion in favor of the energy transition and help accelerate the process of decarbonizing the Spanish economy for a just and sustainable future. In short, the study of narratives reinforces the role of the social dimension of the energy transition and makes it possible to visualize the existing adjustments or discrepancies between the social and human relations that arise in this context of transition towards clean energy.

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