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The role of (de-)essentialisation within siting conflicts: An interdisciplinary approach

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1. Introduction

Many governments worldwide are fostering the deployment of low carbon, specifically renewable, energy technologies (e.g., Renewables Directive, 2009) for tackling climate change. Since electricity systems are centralised in most countries in the global north, energy generation infrastructures are usually large scale and

deployed in rural areas where both natural resources and space are more available. Electricity generation infrastructures are then connected to sites of consumption - mainly urban, industrial areas - through a network of transmission and distribution power lines (Butler, 2001). However, while at a general level the public tends to support renewable energy, when specific infrastructures are to be deployed, opposition to them and associated technologies, such as high voltage power lines (hereafter referred to simply as 'power lines'), is often found, namely from the local communities living nearby (Toke, 2005; Devine-Wright & Batel 2013).

For a long time, the NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) concept was used as a framework to explain local opposition to these and other infrastructures, but it has been criticized for presuming that individual objectors are selfish, ignorant and irrational (Burningham, 2000; Wolsink, 2000; Devine-Wright, 2005). Alternative explanations and pathways of analysis have meanwhile been proposed (see Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015, for a review). Regarding wind farms and power lines, the perceived visual impact of those infrastructures has been identified as one of the main reasons for opposition (Devine-Wright & Batel, 2013; Soini et al. 2011; Wolsink 2000). Wolsink (2000) highlights that "if the perceived visual quality of a project is positive, people will probably support it" (p.51). However, Cowell (2010) goes further in arguing that visual impact is not a quality inherent within a technology, but an outcome of how its visual characteristics are seen as fitting (or not) in particular places - namely, in rural landscapes where such infrastructures are often seen as 'out of place' (Cresswell, 2003).

In turn, Devine-Wright (2009) proposes that NIMBYism should be re-conceptualized as a form of place-protective action that is rooted in place attachments and identities, drawing upon literature from environmental psychology on the

interplay between socio-psychological processes and environmental issues (e.g., Bonaiuto et al., 2002; Carrus et al., 2014). Within this perspective, what is at stake is not simply the perceived visual impact or impact on landscapes of energy technologies, but instead how these are seen as disrupting – or enhancing – particular people-place relations and meanings (see also Carrus et al., 2014; Lewicka, 2005). Devine-Wright & Howes (2010) highlight how opposition is related with the fact that energy infrastructures are often seen as 'industrial' and 'urban' and therefore as being alien to rural landscapes, which are seen as 'natural', 'non-human' and 'unspoilt' (Devine-Wright & Howes, 2010; Barry, Ellis & Robinson, 2008).

This body of research seems to suggest then that one of the main aspects triggering local opposition to energy infrastructures is the perceived lack of 'fit' or compatibility between the essence of energy infrastructures, with their industrial, modern characteristics, and the essence of landscapes, where they are usually deployed, and that are seen – or presented - as natural and pristine. This lack of 'fit' also suggests that people tend to essentialise these two types of landscapes - to represent them as having two different essences that should not be mixed up with each other. Here, we define e*ssentialisation* as the process by which a given entity, like 'nature' or 'woman', is socially constructed as having a particular, natural and unchangeable, essence (Verkuyten, 2003; Butler, 1990).

However, the hypothesis that the essentialisation of rural/natural vs. industrial/human-made landscapes is important in shaping opposition to energy infrastructures has only been implied in previous research - it has not been explicitly examined. This is despite the fact that within the disciplines of social psychology (e.g. Kronberger & Wagner, 2007) and human geography (e.g. Massey, 1991), the role of essentialisation has already been examined to some extent, for example in relation to

inter-group relations, people-place relations and other social objects. Accordingly, the main goals of this paper are to articulate proposals on essentialisation drawing from both disciplines, and to empirically examine if and how essentialisation plays a role in local opposition to energy infrastructures.

Drawing on these literatures, we will depart from three main assumptions. First, that people's relations with place and landscape can be "rhetorically designed and used by people to promote and normalise some versions of person-place relationships whilst undermining other versions" (Di Masso, Dixon, and Pol 2011, p.242/3; see also Carrus, et al., 2009). As suggested before, social science research on people's responses to energy technologies has been advocating the need to take into account place attachments and identities (e.g., Devine-Wright, 2009; Swofford & Slattery 2010; Haggett, 2011; Fresque-Baxter & Armitage, 2012), following research from social and environmental psychology on that (e.g., Carrus et al., 2014; Devine-Wright, 2009; Lewicka, 2005). However, while doing so, that research has often adopted an individual and socio-cognitive perspective (see also Di Masso et al., 2011; Williams, 2013) and neglected that people-place relations are shaped by different and competing representations, claims, and power relations, within and between local communities and individuals. In other words, it has not often critically reflected on and embodied the idea that place attachments and identities are not 'there', but are instead a socially constructed 'way of seeing' (Jones, 1991; Nogué & Vicente, 2004), and also "rhetorical constructions invoked as people seek to influence social relations and policies" (Wallwork & Dixon, 2004, p.35; see also Reicher et al., 1993). In this vein, the present research aims to contribute to the still somewhat marginal line of research within environmental psychology and, specifically, within place attachment and identity research, which conceptualises place identities as rhetorically and

discursively constructed (see Williams, 2013; also Dixon & Durrheim, 2004), or, as Di Masso and colleagues (2011) put it, which looks into place meanings as social, rhetorical and ideological constructions and not as subjective and individual representations.

Second, and in an associated way, while examining essentialisation we will also assume that re-presentations of and relations with place are embedded in culture and fostered by institutional arrangements (Cowell, 2010). Third, following more recent work on essentialisation (e.g., Murphy, 2013; Verkuyten, 2003), we will also investigate whether de-essentialisation discourses (that contest that entities have a single, natural and unchangeable essence) about place and landscape are used in contexts of conflict and what might be their consequences for local responses to energy infrastructures.

2. Constructing rural landscapes[1] – historical and institutional dimensions

As Jones (1991) highlights, there has been an increasing reification of nature as landscape in societies of the northern hemisphere. This reification is associated with the increasing differentiation between the urban and the rural and the associated *aesthetization* of nature, following industrialization and its contestation by the Romantic movement (Murdoch & Lowe, 2003).

For instance, in the UK, the 'countryside' - a term widely used in British culture to refer to rural areas (Woods 2011) – has been the basis of a 'rural idyll' and

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[1] Following Setten (2006), we will use in the remainder of this text the concepts of 'landscape' and 'place' interchangeably.

suggested to be "inseparable from English culture[2] and sense of identity" (Park & Selman, 2011, p.183). Rose (1995) discusses how Englishness, having been menaced from different sources such as immigration, became constructed as more emplaced in the English countryside, where the essence of Englishness is maintained, without outsiders (see also Wallwork & Dixon, 2004). This "landscape of green rolling hills, shady nooks, copses, winding lanes and nestling thatched villages" (Rose, 1995, p.106; see also Neal, 2002; Halfacree, 1995) is then defined in contrast with Others – other landscapes, such as urban,and industrial places, which also represent other social groups – immigrants (particularly, non-white), the poor, … (p.106). Neal (2002) highlights how even recent political rhetoric reifies a "bi-polar cleavage (…) between the stability and safety of the picturesque English pastoral landscape and the instability of the 'unEnglish' urban landscape" (p.445), made up of never-ending changes, industrial development and multiculturalism. "Real" England is therefore a rural "green and pleasant land" (Halfacree, 1996, p.51). However, this social dynamic is not unique to the UK, even if shaped by particular cultural and institutional processes (e.g., Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen 2010; Berg & Forsberg 2003; Hovardas & Stamou 2006; Nogué & Vicente 2004). In Norway, for instance, that social dynamic is also found, with steep mountains and narrow fjords playing a role similar to the green rolling hills of the British countryside (Daugstad, 2008).

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[2] Throughout the paper, both the terms "British" and "English" will be used to refer to the landscape and culture in Britain, following their use by the cited sources. In fact, different authors use either one term or the other, often interchangeably, due to the domination of England over the other constituent nations of Britain and the United Kingdom, namely, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and its power in shaping representations of Britishness as representations of Englishness (Wellings, 2002). As Johnson (2002) puts it "English dominance had already won and spread well beyond England's national borders, so that conceptions of 'Britishness' already privileged senses of Englishness within them" (p. 172). When we are ourselves using those terms, we will choose to use "British" to reflect that influence and because we are referring to the territory of England and Wales – however, this is not to say that there are not differences in the representations of the countryside between Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Cowell (2010) discusses how these cultural representations are embedded in and fostered by institutional processes and how these processes can, in turn, impact on planning practices regarding the deployment of large-scale energy infrastructures in the countryside. In the UK, for instance, since the 1920's planning in the countryside has been restrictive, reflected in efforts towards countryside conservation put forward, for instance, by the Town and Country Planning Acts (Cowell, 2010; see also Jeans, 1990, for an historical account). As Murdoch and Lowe (2003), citing Cherry and Rogers (1996, p.62), put it, "the Town and Country Planning Act 1947 might just as well been called the Town versus Country Planning Act: towns and cities were separate from the countryside and good planning would keep them so", which made rural areas even more appealing to people living in cities, and urban migrants the fiercest supporters of maintaining that rural-urban divide (Murdoch & Lowe, 2003; Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; also Daugstad, 2008). In the UK, this is also evident in the influence that landscape protection organisations have in planning processes, namely, in contesting the deployment of onshore wind farms (Toke, Breukers & Wolsink, 2008). These expectations of the protection of the 'countryside against the city' are still evident today, as indicated by a speech of the Prince of Wales to the Oxford Farming Conference in January 2013, stating that "*Today, as never before, the countryside has become a place where those who live in towns and cities come to recharge their batteries, to find spiritual peace in a world which can seem overwhelmingly noisy and frenetic*".

This body of research highlights how places and landscapes are inter-subjective projects, socially, collaboratively and institutionally constructed (Cowell, 2010; Woods, 2005; Cresswell, 2003; Castree, 2001), and simultaneously material and discursive practices (Haraway, 1997; Braun & Wainwright, 2001; Gailing &

Leibenath, 2015). In sum, the research just discussed, mainly from human geography, departs from asking what is the nature of 'nature', landscapes and places, to suggest that often people will defend a sense of place in certain places based on the construction of those places as having an essence that has to be preserved. In turn, this may lead to exclusion, based on ideas and practices towards the conservation of that essence[3]. This critical uptake of what is 'natural' and the taking into consideration of the ideological imports of naturalising or essentialising places and landscapes, challenges and contributes to research within psychology on people-place relations and on the restorative character of nature, that has often departed from an "imposition of categories of nature which researchers assume to be unproblematic, since they are supposedly cultural if not cognitive universals" (Macnaghten, Brown, & Reicher, 1992, p.44; but see Hovardas & Stamou, 2006). Therefore, we will next look into how essentialisation has been examined and conceptualized within psychology. We will then articulate proposals from these two bodies of research to examine the role that landscape (de-)essentialisation might play in people's responses to the deployment of energy infrastructures.

3. Re-presenting and resistance to change – The role of landscape (de-)essentialisation

Within psychology, essentialisation has been traditionally conceived as a process through which people represent things, based on a belief that things have essences or on a cognitive bias that enables the creation of social categories (see

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[3] This is not to say that non-essentialist views are always 'progressive'– as Doreen Massey (1996, p.123) highlights "equally, to argue unequivocally for open spaces and open places may leave the less powerful places (the space of the domestic, the places of indigenous culture) open to indiscriminate invasion and disruption" (see also Verkuyten, 2003; Castree, 2004).

Mahalingham, 2003, for a review). However, in these conceptions, the ideological import of representation and essentialism is dismissed (Mahalingham, 2003). As Judith Butler (1990) argues, essentialist positions can only be seen as mistaking cultural processes for natural ones, and thus the processes that lead us to think that there is an essential character to any concept or identity are "regulatory fictions". From a post-structuralist, social constructivist perspective, essentialisation is not conceived as something that happens to individuals and groups, but instead as something that is used by social groups and institutions to preserve social, political and economic power, to justify and perpetuate certain social relations (Mahalingam 2003).

More recently then, some social psychologists have begun to highlight the need to examine essentialisation from a socio-constructivist perspective (see Mahalingam, 2003; Verkuyten, 2003; also Howarth, 2009). For instance, Verkuyten (2003) examines essentialisation discourses in regard to multiculturalism, arguing that in an "essentialist discourse, the emphasis is on the inability or impossibility to adapt [to an Other - group, landscape], turning the questions of adaptation or keeping one's culture into factual issues, instead of moral ones" (p.387). Therefore, essentialist ideas must be seen as social practices performed through discourse that can have "a variety of social functions with different ideological consequences" (Verkuyten, 2003, p.372).

In an associated way, Reicher and Hopkins (1996) suggest how national identities can be seen as projects, the success of which depends upon them being seen as an essence (see also Howarth, 2009). Batel and Castro (2009) have discussed how reification – or the prescription of a given way of thinking and acting about an object - can be used by social groups to defend their identity projects and resist change, based

on an either/or type of thinking that does not allow for different representations to be articulated with each other. In other words, reification, as a communicative format, can be seen as based in and fostering the essentialisation of identities and associated power relations.

Wallwork & Dixon (2004), looking specifically at the interplay between national identity and place constructions, highlight how place constructions may essentialise social identities and associated practices, in such a way that relations between people and place are seen as natural, organic and as always having been there. This in turn can be used to justify and legitimize people's stakes regarding other social issues - for instance, defending hunting in the British countryside - as something which is integral to the definition of that landscape and, in turn, of Britishness, as the British countryside is where Britishness 'takes place' and is to be found (Wallwork & Dixon, 2004).

Finally, other authors have examined how essentialisation has been used as a representational and identity tool with both epistemic and moral functions for making sense of new technologies (Wagner et al., 2010; Kronberger & Wagner, 2007). Regarding genetically modified organisms (GMOs), the authors highlight that when two 'essences' are mixed and an 'hybrid' is constructed (e.g., mixing genes of a trout with genes of a penguin) people tend to feel repugnance, threatened, in danger; and those 'hybrid' beings tend to be objectified as monstrous and alien. The authors also highlight, in line with what others have suggested (e.g. Verkuyten, 2003), that different contexts – e.g., talking about something in general vs. in relation to the self - might constrain or enhance essentialising strategies, suggesting that de-essentialisation strategies might be used. In other words, de-essentialisation - negating

that something or someone has an essence - can also be strategically used for contesting, fostering or negotiating certain practices.

In sum, the proposals from human geography and social and environmental psychology suggest that essentialisation is a social construction and a political process that can be used to negotiate or maintain given power relations. However, and associated with their traditional disciplinary focuses, one can say that whereas psychology has focused mainly on essentialisation as an individual and group process and on its impact for intergroup relations, human geography has instead highlighted more the cultural, historical and institutional dimensions of essentialisation, namely, of space and place, of the landscape. In this paper, informed by both disciplines, we aim to further our understanding of essentialisation and de-essentialisation to examine people's responses to energy infrastructures (in this case high voltage power lines) in rural landscapes, therefore contributing to research that has investigated the role of place attachments, identity and meanings for understanding local responses. We will do this by departing from the following research questions: Does landscape essentialisation play a role in people's responses to energy technologies? Specifically, is essentialisation used in opposition to low carbon and associated energy infrastructures? How? How are landscapes and technologies and their mixing up re-presented? How is essentialisation used to negotiate responses to new energy infrastructures with other groups, at different scales? What consequences might it have for the definition of acceptable locations for energy infrastructures?

4. Method

This study is based on data from four case studies - two each in the UK[4] and Norway[5] – for the construction of new power lines (see Figure 1). The case studies were selected to ensure a high degree of variability across national contexts according to the stage that they were at in the planning process; so that they were located in different geographic regions in the two countries; that they had generated already some controversy; and so that they were different in terms of the major 'need-arguments' used to develop them (see XXX, for more details).

Figure 1 – Geographical location of the four case studies

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[4] In the UK, only England and Wales were considered for the selection of the case studies as they have the same transmission network operator.

[5] Both the cross-cultural data sets and the selection of different case studies was not aimed at performing a comparative analysis but instead, in this case, just used as examples of the same socio-psychological and geographical processes.
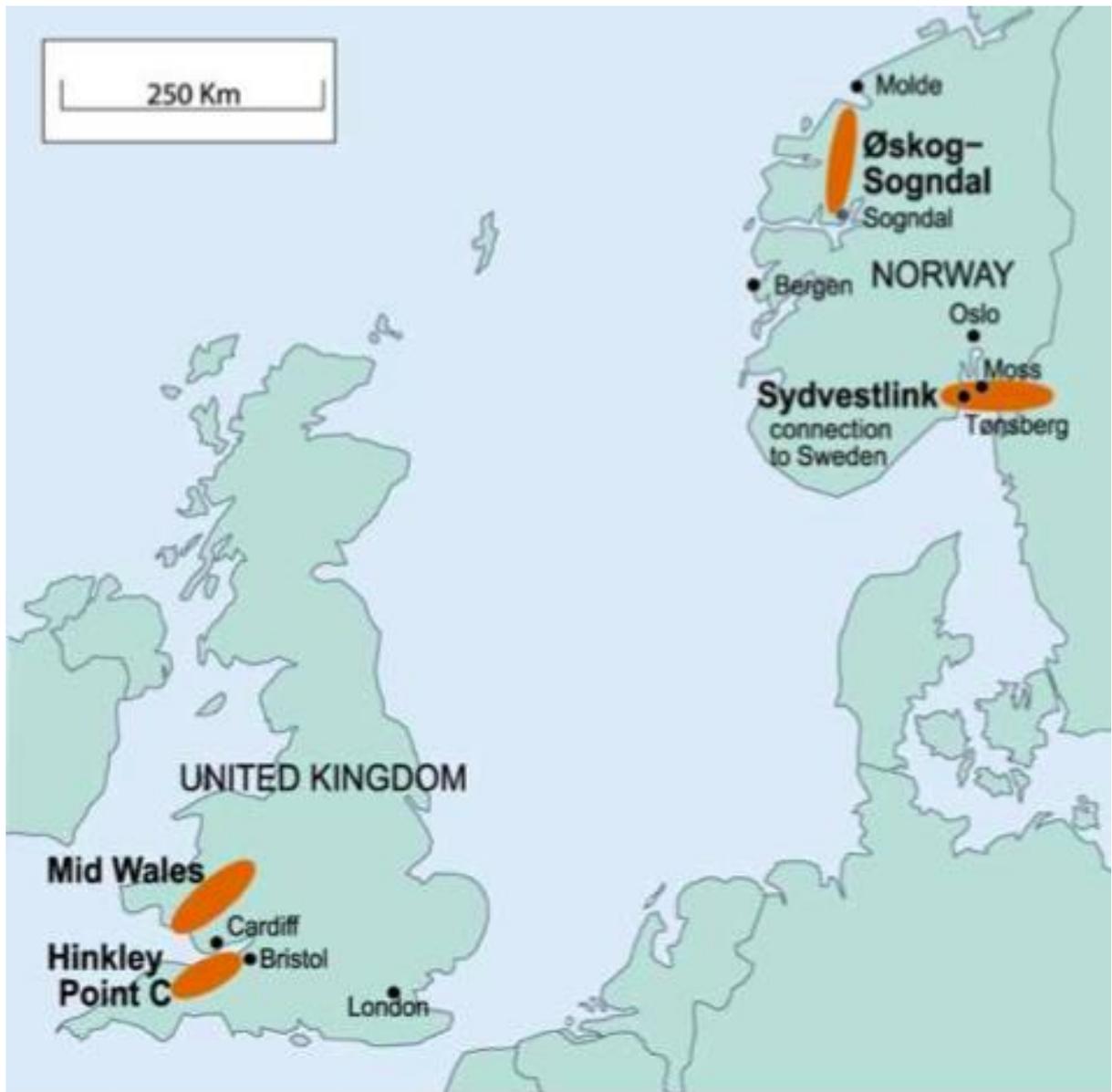
In the UK, the cases were the Hinkley Point C connection project in South West England (this power line was planned to connect a new nuclear power station to the grid, and when data was collected the application for the project had already been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate, which is the agency responsible for development consent); and the Mid Wales connection project (this power line was planned to connect new onshore wind farms in Wales to the grid in England, and when data was collected it was at the pre-application stage, namely the stage of consultation and assessments to develop final draft designs for the connection and

substation before submitting an application to the Planning Inspectorate). In Norway, the cases were the Ørskog-Sogndal connection project (this power line was planned in order to strengthen security of supply and connect small scale renewable energy, and when data was collected the project was already approved for final concession – however constructions were postponed due to lawsuits) and the Sydvestlinken project (this power line was planned to strengthen the electricity network between Norway and Sweden and data was collected at the stage when environmental impact assessments had started [6]). The two British power lines and the power line to be constructed in Ørskog-Sogndal mainly go across rural areas, while the Sydvestlinken power line was planned to go in a mix of rural and more urbanized areas (at least in a Norwegian context).

In total, 15 focus groups were conducted, 8 in the UK and 7 in Norway: 4 for the Hinkley Point C connection, 2 of them in the same settlement – Hinkley 2a and 2b; 4 for the Mid Wales connection, 2 of them in the same settlement – MidWales 5a and 5b; 4 for the Ørskog-Sogndal connection, 3 of them in the same settlement - Ørskog-Sogndal 1a, 1b and 1c; 3 for the Sydvestlinken connection, all in different settlements. The specific locations were selected because they are proximate to the proposed power lines. Each focus group (Medium length = 1h30m) was composed of 3 to 8 participants, who were all local residents (from the respective settlement) recruited to guarantee a heterogeneous sample of adult residents in terms of socio-demographic characteristics and their views over the projects (see Table 1). Participants in the UK were compensated with a 30 pounds voucher for their participation in the focus groups and all of them – in the UK and Norway - lived in the settlement where the focus groups were conducted.

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[6] However, the project was abandoned in June 2013 for not being socio-economically profitable.

The focus groups were conducted in a room in the town/village hall whenever possible or, if not, in an alternative community space, during the Spring of 2013. The focus groups were always moderated by one of the authors of this manuscript in each country and always with the presence of an assistant that would support the moderator on more logistical aspects, such as being responsible for audio recording the discussions and taking notes of where participants sat in the room. The focus groups were audio recorded with the informed consent of the participants, who were also requested to consent with the use of the focus groups' discussion for academic purposes and guaranteed full confidentiality and anonymity. This study was part of a larger research project aimed at better understanding people's responses to high voltage power lines through a comparative approach between the UK and Norway (see the Acknowledgments).

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants in the focus groups in the UK and Norway

Country	Focus group	N	Age range	Females (%)	Professional occupation (%)
	Hinkley 1	7	30-70	35	3 x Retired 4 x Worker/employee
	Hinkley 2a	7	37-74	29	1 x Retired 6 x Worker/employee
	Hinkley 2b	6	22-61	50	1 x Retired 5 x Worker/employee
UK	Hinkley 3	7	40-65	71	4 x Retired 3 x Worker/employee

	Midwales 4	7	24-70	57	1 x Retired 6 x worker/employee
	Midwales 5a	5	30-70	20	1 x Retired 4 x Worker/employee
	Midwales 5b	5	35-70	80	1 x Retired 4 x Worker/employee
	Midwales 6	6	46-63	50	2 x Retired 4 x Worker/employee
Norway	Ørskog-Sogndal 1a	8	28-68	63	2 x Retired 6 x Working/employee
	Ørskog-Sogndal 1b	6	36-60	33	1 x Retired 5 x Working/employee
	Ørskog-Sogndal 1c	3	40-77	0	1 x Retired 2 x Working/employee
	Ørskog-Sogndal 2	6	26-55	50	6 x Working
	Sydvestlinken 1	3	40-60	33	3 x Working
	Sydvestlinken 2	7	30-45	43	7 x Working
	Sydvestlinken 3	6	30-55	33	6 x Working

The topics in the focus groups' guidelines focused around two main themes: questions around participants' relation with the place where they live; and questions about power lines in general and the specific project to be constructed. All focus group interviews were fully transcribed and data analysis performed through the software Atlas.ti v.5.2. The data collected in the two countries was analysed by two different teams, each one based in each country. At a first stage, the two teams developed together, both through email contact and face-to-face meetings, a common coding scheme, based on the principles of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006),

developed mainly in a bottom-up way, based on the data. This first stage allowed us to organise the data so that a second, more fine-grained discursive rhetorical analysis (see Billig, 1991; Di Masso et al., 2011), could then be performed. This analysis, based on a socio-constructionist, discursive methodological approach to the data, examines language not as a neutral 'container' of meanings but instead as an active means of constructing reality – or, as Dixon & Durrheim (2004) highlight while describing a discursive approach to textual analysis "this methodological approach does not reduce to a fixed recipes of steps; rather it is based around the application of a more general set of orienting principles. The most important of these principles derives from the assumption that linguistic accounts of social life, including accounts of (the transformation of) place, are reality-constructing." (p. 463).

At this stage of rhetorical discourse analysis, a sample of the data from each country was also analyzed by the team from the other country. For this analysis, we focused on examining if and how essentialisation discourses were used by the participants, following the research questions. On one hand, we examined if discourses presented rural landscapes and high-voltage power lines as having different essences and how they represented their mixing up, that is, power lines in the countryside. On the other hand, we examined if and how de-essentialisation was used in different contexts throughout the focus groups' discussions and what functions did it serve.

5. Analyses

5.1. The essence of the landscape-countryside vs. industrialized Britain/Norway

To position themselves regarding the deployment of power lines in rural landscapes, participants often organised their discourse based on the comparison between the characteristics of the countryside in general and the characteristics of power lines, and how the latter will impact on the former. This is exemplified in the extracts below:

Set of extracts n.1[7]:

a. P1 - *a pylon is a pylon is a pylon, it's still a scar on the landscape* [Mid Wales 6]

b. P5 - *the atmosphere* [of the countryside].... *It is spiritual dare I say, you know, and it's not going to get destroyed by these...* [Mid Wales 5b]

c. P2 - *Extremely tall kind of like towers which bear no resemblance to the countryside they're passing through and are imposed on the landscape rather than growing out of it ...* [Mid Wales 5b]

d. P1 - *I've got a picture from Hardanger. There's a red dot right there, but that's really a woman. And that's when you start to realize which dimensions we're talking about....and this you put up in the Norwegian nature!* [Ørskog-Sogndal 2][8]

e. P3 - (…) *when we got, what I would claim, the greatest man-made disturbance of nature that has ever happened in* [place name]*, of course*

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[7] In the extracts from the focus groups to be presented, the use of single underline aims to highlight important parts of the quotations, whereas the use of double underline intends to highlight specific discursive constructions that will be taken up in a detailed way in our analyses regarding the effects or functions they perform.

[8] The Norwegian focus groups were conducted in Norwegian. Analyses of the Norwegian data was performed in Norwegian - however selected citations were carefully translated by using a process where the Norwegian citations were first translated to English, and then by another translator back to Norwegian, to check for consistency.

it's…we really appreciate the nature and we don't want to destroy it. [Ørskog-Sogndal 2]

Power lines, specifically, pylons, both in the UK and Norway, are represented as having *dimensions* and other characteristics that will *scar* and *destroy* the countryside or *the nature*, as they are *man*[human]*-made* and will therefore be *imposed on the landscape rather than*, contrarily to what the 'natural' essence of the countryside or nature would imply, *growing out of it* (see also Usher, 2013). The extracts suggest that pylons are represented as having an unchanging essence – *a pylon is a pylon is a pylon* – that *bears no resemblance* to the *spiritual,* natural and organic essence of the countryside, and therefore they cannot be changed to fit with it. In this vein, pylons are also associated with other meanings, embedded in wider discourses over rural landscapes as opposed to urban ones, as illustrated in the extracts below:

Set of extracts n.2:

a. P4 – *coming on holiday here and people do initially feel their getting an escape from industrialised Britain and you know built up Britain to be able to go to somewhere with a beautiful natural environment and in a way you know there's a criticism that we are somehow NIMBYS but it's not just that, you're also again custodians of this area* (…) *which is for the enjoyment of all of us and the visitors* [Mid Wales 6]

b. P5 - *I mean people come here to get away from city life, town life and whatever. If there's like, stuff like pylons, what they see around where they*

leave, _well they're not really going to come here_, they come here they _come to_
get away from that you know, [to come to the] _countryside and fresh air_ [Mid
Wales 4]

c. P1 -_I work in_ [place]_, so I travel… I use 1,5 hrs to travel each direction every_
day. But _it's worth it. I really appreciate the_ … _the untouched_. _And_ _that's the_
one factor that worried me the most [Sydvestlinken 1]

These extracts further reinforce that rural landscapes and power lines –
associated with _city life_ and _industrialized_ areas - are represented as having two
different essences. In fact, extract n.2b clearly highlights how the countryside is seen
as an entity, a place (_somewhere_, as also put in extract n.2a), that either is there or is
not: the discourse uses an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) - by pointing
out that if pylons are deployed in the countryside then city people are not _really going_
to come here -, in order to emphasize that the countryside has certain characteristics,
that if changed make the essence of the countryside disappear altogether therefore
justifying that people could no longer want to go there. In this sense, and as found by
Verkuyten (2003), essentialist discourses make it possible to emphasize that what is at
stake is not an unwillingness to adapt, but instead the inability or impossibility to do
so, due to the different, incompatible, essences of pylons and rural landscapes.

That also becomes clear in the first extract, in which the discourse is
constructed in order to counter-argue the possibility of members of local communities
that are against the power lines being perceived as NIMBYs. The discourse uses
essentialisation or the accentuation of the two different essences between places with
beautiful natural environments and _built up Britain_ to justify that the first one has to
be preserved – and this is not due to members of local communities who oppose the

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development being self-interested but, instead, acting as place-protectors - as *custodians of this area* and of that essence (see also Usher, 2013; Daugstad, 2008). This highlights then how not only things might be preferred because they are seen as natural, but also that people are aware that "defining things as natural will lead them to being preferred" (Macnaghten, et al., 1992, p.45; also Reicher et al., 1993). Additionally, it is interesting to note how to maximize the presentation of these rural landscapes as having an essence that 'objectively' has to be preserved, the discourse in the first extract mobilizes not only members of the local communities, *but all of us and the visitors* to talk about that (see also Daugstad, 2005).

It is also important to note how the use of the societal discourse regarding the value of the countryside as a place that contributes to people's well-being while allowing them *"to recharge their batteries, to find spiritual peace"* (Prince of Wales, 2013) is consequential, as it involves accounts and claims that are socially shared and valued and, thus, legitimised (see also Verkuyten, 2003). Extracts n.2c and n.1b above clearly illustrate that, as do other discourses in the focus groups, such as when emphasizing that the essence of the countryside and the rural can even change people's own essence: "*from being a wild child from an urban environment, from a council estate in London, she has come to* [place name] *and become a calmer person*" [P1, Hinkley 2b].

This essentialisation of the countryside relies then on the social construction of the rural as an 'idyll' (Woods, 2011), "a place of stability and retreat" (Neal, 2002, p.444) from and as opposed to urban, industrial areas. In turn, these cultural representations are embedded in and fostered by current institutional representations of the rural and the urban, that participants' discourses also use to further legitimise that the countryside actually has an essence that needs to be preserved:

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Set of extracts n.3:

a. P4 - (…) *Town and Country Planning Act* (…) *has been <u>protection for the countryside, you could see this kind of <u>urban sprawl that was <u>going to be eating into our countryside</u> and denied the nation of that place where you could <u>actually go to</u></u></u>* (…) *it's a big national thing* and *<u>this isn't just about us</u> (…) <u>about all of this countryside</u> now* [Mid Wales 6]

b. P1 - *When speaking of values… nature and such things, then we were really happy when <u>we found a legislation act</u>, so to speak, <u>that said it could be possible to use undergrounding on sections where such a measure provide "specific environmental gains"</u> (…). <u>And then we realized that if there's any place one is to use such a statute it is here in</u>* [place name]*<u>, right?</u>* [Ørskog-Sogndal 2]

Extract n.3a further reinforces that the countryside, as a whole, is represented as having an essence, it is **<u>a</u>** *place where you could <u>actually</u> go to*, has an identity. And that essence is presented as a symbol of the nation, as materializing and emplacing it (see also Wallwork & Dixon 2004) – again, destroying that essence is therefore *a big national thing, isn't just about us* but *about all of this countryside*, *<u>our countryside</u>*. It is important to note that the discourse is organized using an analogy between urban sprawl and its effects on rural landscapes, and power lines. The discourse links and puts close together national identity and distinctiveness with who values the countryside and wants it to be preserved and not eaten by urban sprawl – or pylons, therefore suggesting that the protagonists of urban sprawl – urban to rural migrants,

immigrants - or related menaces to the character of the countryside, can also be seen as menacing national identity, endangering the distinctiveness of the nation. In other words, while the discourse is built to further legitimize the importance of preserving the countryside as the symbol of the nation, it is also based upon ideological connotations regarding important social issues, such as the migration of (more) people to the countryside.

However, it is also very important to note that extract n.3a talks about urban sprawl and its effects on the essence of the countryside by relying on the institutional representation about that relation, specifically as put forward by UK's Town and Country Planning Act. This allows for the suggestion that the willingness to preserve the essence of the countryside is not something only desired by local communities, but at a wider, national political level. And, on the other hand, to also emphasize that despite that the *Town and Country Planning Act* (…) *has been protection for the countryside*, this is at odds with the central government fostering at the same time the deployment of new large-scale energy infrastructures there, which can be seen as having the same effects in the countryside as urban sprawl. The same is present in extract n.3b, by contrasting what is put forward by institutional documents and what happens in practice when deploying power lines.

5.2. Feelings and images about the mixing up of industrialized and natural landscapes

As seen so far, the countryside or rural landscapes are presented in participants' discourses in a reified and essentialist way: as *the countryside*. Therefore, when participants talk about the mixing up of that essence with the essence of urban, industrial landscapes, materialized through power lines, their feelings about

it are similar to those identified by Wagner, Kronberger and colleagues (2010; 2007) regarding GMOs. This is illustrated in the extracts below:

Set of extracts n.4:

a. M[oderator] - *So what were your first reactions then when you first found out about it?* P5 - *Disgust.*
   P1 - *Absolute horror – horror…* [Mid Wales 5b]

b. P1 - *But I think it will be said if when we're driving out when we see these horrible huge things, if they really are a monstrosity then we'll all be kicking ourselves* [Hinkley 2a]

c. P1 - *and you see South Wales Docks and you think 'Oh my God that's horrible', go over the other side, look from South Wales back to Bristol and you think 'Yuck, that's even worse'* [Hinkley 2b]

d. P1 -*So… the reason why I became engaged I guess is that we have fantastic nature here. And these monstrous lines…* [Ørskog-Sogndal 2]

e. P5 - *In relation to a pollution perspective, well, visual pollution is part of it* [Sydvestlinken 3]

These extracts suggest that the mixing up of power lines with the countryside provokes feelings of horror and disgust, arising from the contamination and pollution of the countryside (see Douglas, 1966; also Barry et al., 2008). This is further reinforced by the use of the 'Yuck' expression by one of the participants (Extract 4.c), also found in research looking at resistance to recycled water (e.g., Callaghan,

Moloney, & Blair 2012), and becomes very clear in extract n4.e . Additionally, it is interesting to see how the mixing up of those two essences is objectified as *monstrous* (Extracts 4.b and 4.d), in the same way that GMO's were (Kronberger and Wagner, 2007). This is also present in the extract n3.a above when urban sprawl, as an analogy to pylons, is presented as *going to be eating into our countryside*, or, in other words, as a monster, a predator, that will devour the countryside, making it disappear.

5.3. The essences of the countryside, or how some 'sides' have more 'country' than others…: An example of de-essentialisation

So far we have seen that the countryside or rural landscapes are presented in participants' discourses in an essentialist way. However, in other parts of focus groups' discussions and, namely, when discussing the deployment of power lines near their communities and what could otherwise be acceptable locations for those infrastructures, participants' discourses instead suggest that there are some *sides* that are more *country* than others… This is exemplified in the extracts below:

Set of extracts n.5:

a. P5 - *Montgomeryshire is a very rural county* (…)*, very beautiful landscapes rolling valleys and hills, um very green…*

  P6 - *I think it's like the greenest county in Wales* (…) *the rolling hills and I've had the experience of living in other areas* [in Britain] (…) *where are hills and mountains but they are not - you know none of those counties are as green and as rolling as this county* [Mid Wales 6]

b. P4 - *Up in the alpine mountains they've put it! At the foot of… at the beginning of the Sunnmøre Alps they've put a transformer station! And they've made a road… I'm assuming it will be lit up and asphalted. Straight up in…up in the mountains!"* [Ørskog-Sogndal 2]

c. P5 – *Because National Geographic has… two times they have selected these areas of the Norwegian fjords as the world's best* [tourist] *destination. Because of the nature. And that alone proves that we have outstanding natural resources* [Ørskog-Sogndal 2]

In extract 5.a, the countryside in Montgomeryshire is presented as characterized by being very green and having rolling hills and valleys – no other counties seem to be *as green and as rolling* as Montgomeryshire. In turn, these characteristics have long been identified as those attributed to Britain: as a landscape of green rolling hills (see Rose, 1995; also Wallwork & Dixon, 2004), as the materialization of British identity (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998). The discourses in Extract n.5a are then built to accentuate how Montgomeryshire is more representative or paradigmatic of the countryside than other counties in Wales and England, or, in other words, has more of the essence of the (British) countryside than other 'countrysides' in Britain – therefore justifying that power lines should not be built specially in that area. Extracts n.5b and n.5c also use the same discursive strategy by specifying that it is a particular type of rural landscape in Norway – the alpine mountains of the Sunnmøre Alps and the fjords of Sykkylven – that cannot be mixed up with and destroyed by pylons (Daugstad, 2008).

Participants' discourses point out how some 'countrysides' or rural landscapes should be considered as more appropriate locations for building new energy infrastructures, as they don't have as much of the essence of the countryside that is paradigmatic of Britishness or of Norway. This can be seen as a strategic use of (de-)essentialisation, as in these parts of the focus groups, discourses present the landscape in a heterogeneous way, with some particular landscapes presented as lacking more the essence of the countryside or as already being hybrid in some ways – mixing up natural and industrial essences – and therefore as being more acceptable locations for the deployment of those infrastructures. This is further illustrated in the extracts below:

Set of extracts n.6:

a. P5 – (…) *it's just pretty flat open countryside*

    P6 - *Precisely yes which is fine isn't it*

    P5- *less um… obtrusive in that sort of landscape than they potentially would in our landscape* [Mid Wales 6]

b. P5 - *it's strange* *if you drive over the M62 from Manchester towards Leeds and you've got all this moorland at two thousand feet boring landscape, motorway runs through it, and you can't see a turbine anywhere* [Mid Wales 6]

c. P4 - *They should never have put it up in… it should never have been put in such a totally untouched area. Here are places with lots of building, with lots of industry…* [Ørskog-Sogndal 2]

Extracts n.6a, while talking about what could be an acceptable location for the new pylons, accentuate how those locations lack the essence of the 'true' countryside – they are *just pretty flat countryside*, *which is fine isn't it*, as pylons would be *less obtrusive in that sort of landscape than* (…) *in our landscape* (see also extract n.6b). It is particularly worth noting in extract n.6b how not only specific types of 'countrysides' are presented as less so than others, but also how that comes related with those landscapes being already hybrid ones – which further accentuates that they lack the 'true' essence of the countryside. Specifically, it is noted how the landscape between Manchester and Leeds not only is *boring* but also already has a motorway running *through it* – and, despite this, *you can't see a* [wind] *turbine anywhere*. This is even clearer in extract n.6c.

In sum, these extracts show that (de-)essentialisation can be strategically used to present the same object either "as natural (to enhance its value and make any development illegitimate) or as [already] non-natural (to decrease its value and suggest that development can do no further harm)" (Macnagthen et al., 1992). However, de-essentialisation discourses propose that other 'countrysides' are more appropriate areas to build new pylons, which not only excludes specific technological developments from taking place in the areas of the countryside where these participants live, but also excludes other places and groups. In fact, it is through positing other 'countrysides' as lacking the essence of *the* countryside and therefore as being acceptable places to construct pylons, or, in other words, through defining what lies outside (Cresswell, 2003), that these discourses are able to further reify the essence and identity of *the* countryside[9]. This reification-type communication (Batel

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[9] Whereas these discourses were transversal to most focus groups and participants, there were some instances in which more consensualisation-like discourses were present. These discourses, being more based in perspective-taking (see Batel & Castro, 2009), suggested the idea that '*there is always*

& Castro, 2009) is then used to affirm and legitimize that the countryside where these participants live is actually the one where pylons do not fit, and, through that, seeks to maintain previously existing 'geographies of power' (Massey, 1995, p.71) if we consider that they intend to reify already less 'natural' or more industrialized landscapes as such (e.g. where transport infrastructure already exists), by suggesting that those are the landscapes where new energy infrastructures should be deployed.

However, members of some communities to be affected by new power lines that live in those already hybrid, more industrialized landscapes (namely, in Hinkley 3, UK and Sydvestlinken 2 and 3, Norway), have also participated in the focus groups' discussions that we conducted. In turn, those landscapes are still presented as being intrinsically natural, as having the paradigmatic essence of *the* countryside, as illustrated in the first extract below, taken from the focus group conducted in Hinkley 3, a village with a motorway running across it:

Set of extracts n.7:

a. P7 - *almost wherever you look or wherever you stand at the moment <u>to all intents and purposes</u> you are <u>in a village in the middle of</u> … <u>the country (…) the green um and the views</u>* [Hinkley 3]

b. P1 - *(…) and SydvestLinken… it's the volume. <u>When is enough, enough? And when do you reach the pain tolerance level?</u>* [Sydvestlinken 2]

Extract n.7a puts it quite clearly that one of the main things defining Hinkley 3 as a village is that it is a *village in the middle of the country, the green*, that is, in the

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someone to upset no matter what you are doing' [Mid Wales 5a, 19:305], which might be seen as yet another example of (de-)essentialisation, but in a more progressive sense (Massey, 1995).

middle of the one paradigmatic British countryside – and the use of *country* as an abbreviation of 'countryside' is quite illustrative of the close relation between this landscape and British national identity (see also Wallwork & Dixon, 2004). However, it is worth noting that to present the village as part of the country, the discourse starts by using a prepositional phrase – *to all intents and purposes* - intended to emphasize that in every practical sense or <u>in essence</u> the village still <u>*is*</u> the country, even if it has a motorway going across it and thus other people might think otherwise.

Extract n.7b also demonstrates how people living in places which are considered by residents in other, more 'natural' areas, as already hybrid and industrialized and thus as not worth of 'preserving' as they are, disagree with that idea. This extract, by rhetorically asking *when is enough, enough?*, highlights how deploying more infrastructures in landscapes which already have some of those, is perceived as unfair and inequitable, further accentuating already existent geographies of power and exclusion, while causing more *pain* to those who are already 'suffering'.

6. Conclusions and Discussion

In this paper we aimed to draw upon literatures from psychology and human geography to examine a neglected area of research – how place meanings, and, specifically the essentialisation of landscapes, as rhetorical and ideological constructions play a role in shaping people's responses to new energy infrastructures. Previous research, informed by concepts of place attachment and place identity, had suggested that people represent rural landscapes and energy infrastructures as having two different essences and that this seemed to play a role in public opposition to those technologies, but had not systematically examined this hypothesis (e.g., Devine-

Wright & Howes, 2010). Additionally, that body of research has often assumed that the way people represent and relate with place and landscapes is actually 'there', and not instead socially and discursively constructed, and politically used. By contrast, we argued that the essentialisation of landscapes and associated place attachments might be actively and strategically used, as rhetorical and ideological constructions, to negotiate and legitimize specific practices and particular responses to social relations and policies (Wallwork & Dixon 2004).

By analyzing data from focus group discussions conducted with members of local communities in two European countries affected by new power lines, we have demonstrated how landscape essentialisation shapes people's representations of new energy technologies, and that (de-)essentialisation can be used strategically to justify and legitimize those representations. The analyses illustrate that it is crucial to examine people-place relations and representations about places and landscapes not as being 'there', but instead as identity and political projects. Our analyses revealed that whereas in some contexts participants presented rural landscapes in general and pylons as having two different essences and relied on this to justify opposition, in other contexts participants present the rural landscapes in the place where they live as having more of the essence of rural landscapes than other areas of the country. In turn, this allowed them to legitimize claims that whereas power lines are 'out of place' in rural landscapes in general, this is even more the case in the place where they live, therefore suggesting a sort of spatial optimism (Gifford et al., 2009), but a strategic one, through which things are posited as being better here, close by, than they are there, far away. In fact, our analyses showed that this spatial optimism can not only be strategically used through essentialisation, but also that it is socially elaborated (Uzzell, 2000), as people are aware that it is considered legitimate to 'defend' the

place where they live, especially if this place can be considered natural and unspoilt. In other words, the analyses showed that essentialisation is indeed a representational and identity tool used by people to respond to and, specifically, oppose, power lines and other energy infrastructures, and thus that "essentialism and de-essentialism are discourses available for situated purposes" (Verkuyten, 2003, p.387).

However, our analyses also showed that (de-)essentialising is not only an individual, relational-contextual endeavor, but also, a cultural and institutional one (Cowell, 2010; Macnagthen & Urry, 1998; Wallwork & Dixon, 2004) as well as a political process (Rose, 1995; Neal, 2002). In fact, the essentialisation of rural landscapes and of towns and cities has historical roots and is therefore not only embedded in culture but also in institutional processes and practices that shape and are used by people to legitimize their own representations over the relationship between the town and the country, between pylons and the countryside. This is further reinforced by our findings showing that, despite the societal differences between the UK and Norway, the use of (de-)essentialisation to talk about the siting of energy infrastructures in rural landscapes was quite similar across those two contexts. In an associated way, we showed that essentialisation is a political process, as it can be used by individuals and groups to pursue specific agendas and interests to the detriment of Others – other landscapes, other groups (Rose, 1995) – or, in other words, and as pointed out by Hakli and Paassi (2003), that (de-)essentialisation as representational processes of "difference and similarity are linked with social power relations occurring on various spatial scales" (p.147). This political dimension is often neglected by environmental psychological research (see Di Masso et al., 2011, for a critique), but highlights how, contrary to the mainstream conceptualization (e.g., Fresque-Baxter & Armitage, 2012), place attachments and identities are socially

constructed, negotiated and contested projects. In turn, recognizing this is crucial not only to better understand how people relate with and become attached or not to places across space and time (see also Williams, 2013), but also how people-place relations and associated identity projects might impact on important environmental issues such as climate change (see also Reicher et al., 1993). In other words, and as Di Masso and colleagues (2011) put it, this type of approach and analyses "sensitise us to the broader political and historical dimension of discursive conflicts over the meaning of space and place. They remind us that individuals' accounts of place inevitably echo and rework the collective commonsense of the 'thinking [and arguing] society' " (p.237).

These analyses have important implications for the identification of what can be acceptable locations for the deployment of new energy infrastructures. The analyses suggest that doing so in rural landscapes, if they are represented as natural and untouched and energy technologies as the very opposite of that (see also McLachlan 2009), is prone to provoke opposition – but the analyses also suggest that deploying new energy infrastructures in 'semi-rural/urban landscapes', already industrialized in the eyes of some, might not be supported either. In the case of power lines, one of the solutions could be undergrounding them, as arguably this overcomes resistance towards the mixing up of the essences of pylons and of the countryside. Undergrounding allows the deployment of power lines as if they were actually not there - at least to a greater extent than overhead lines do (see Devine-Wright & Batel 2013).

Whereas the analyses just presented gave new insights on the role of landscapes' essentialisation in shaping responses to energy infrastructures and on essentialisation itself, they still leave several questions unanswered. One of them being precisely if

and how other socio-psychological processes and discursive practices – such as other forms of de-essentialisation, consensualisation (see Batel & Castro, 2009), a progressive sense of place (see Massey, 1995), political affiliation (Wagner et al., 2010), among others – can be related with accepting the place and landscape where one lives as an acceptable location for energy infrastructures. The analyses just presented focused mainly on better understanding if and how (de-)essentialisation plays a role in local communities' opposition to new energy infrastructures – but this does not preclude that essentialisation can play a role in how local communities express acceptance of or even support for new energy infrastructures (see footnote 9, for an example). McLachlan (2009) has shown that representing wave energy infrastructures as being 'one with Nature' and the place where they are to be built as 'natural', is associated with public support. Therefore, in the future, it will be relevant to further explore if and how people de-essentialise the local landscape where they live and, in a related way, if and how other mitigation measures of the impact of pylons in rural landscapes are associated with de-essentialisation.

It will also be relevant for future research to examine how landscape essentialisation, and its use to shape responses to energy infrastructures, are linked with other societal issues and debates, at local and global levels, such as immigration and carbon colonialism. Finally, future research should also better discuss and analyze in more detail the ways that policy-making and planning foster the essentialisation of the countryside (see also Cowell, 2010) and, through that, opposition to the deployment of 'green' energy infrastructures, even if it is arguably in the interests of policy-making and planning that those energy infrastructures are deployed without opposition (e.g., Renewables Directive, 2009).

In sum, the present research has contributed to a better understanding of essentialisation and the role it plays in shaping people's responses to local environmental change, in this case new energy infrastructures. Addressing a neglect in research on place meanings, attachments and identities as rhetorical and ideological constructions, the findings reveal multiple ways that places and technologies can be re-presented in order to justify particular arguments and positions. One of the consequences of these findings is to demonstrate that it is crucial not to examine people-place relations as self-evidently being 'there', but instead to examine how they are used to negotiate and pursue specific interests and projects, including identity ones. In this vein, it is very important for research on place attachment and identity to recognise that these emerge, at least, "from a complex interplay of identity and interest group politics" (Sletto, 2002, p.413), and are shaped by historical, cultural and institutional processes created by distinct but intertwined spaces of representation involving visual artists, novelists, the media, policy-makers, rural and urban inhabitants, and academic researchers, to name but a few.

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