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TITLE: Re-presenting the rural in the UK press: An exploration of the construction, contestation and negotiation of media discourses on the rural within post-carbon energy transitions

ABSTRACT:

Governments worldwide are promoting the deployment of low-carbon energy generation and associated infrastructures, such as wind farms and high voltage power lines. These are mainly large-scale and built in rural areas, where more space and resources are available. When specific infrastructures are constructed in rural places, opposition is often found, namely from the local communities living nearby, revealing how energy transitions create socio-spatial justice conflicts. Social sciences' research on energy transitions and rural studies have been increasingly highlighting how diverse imaginaries of the rural are mobilized in siting disputes, by community members and developers alike, either to contest the deployment of energy infrastructures or to promote them. However, an examination of the role of the media - an important actor reflecting and shaping public opinion - in re-presenting the rural in relation to energy transitions has been largely overlooked so far. This paper analyses UK newspapers' (Guardian, Times, Sun) discourses on the rural within post-carbon energy transitions, in the period from 2008 (pre-Renewables Directive 2009) to 2014. Based on these analyses, the role of new energy landscapes in (re-)interpretations of rurality and the role of these in post-carbon energy transitions will be discussed.

KEYWORDS: re-presentations of the rural; media analysis; post-carbon energy transitions; UK

1. INTRODUCTION

“But I can’t help but worry for old England, she says. The furious grumpy faces, like caricatures on some terrible sitcom on TV. England’s green unpleasant land.”

In Ali Smith, *Winter*, 2017, p. 208

In the last decades, governments worldwide have been promoting the deployment of renewable energy generation and associated infrastructures, as one of the main mitigation measures of climate change (Renewables Directive, 2009). In turn, the achievement of these goals is mainly trying to be performed within the current model of electricity systems that is prevalent in most countries, that is, a centralised one (Walker and Cass, 2007). Within this model, electricity networks are based on large-scale infrastructures for energy production, such as coal fired power stations or wind farms, usually located in remote rural and coastal areas, which are connected to a national grid of transmission and distribution lines responsible for the transport of energy to sites of demand, which is usually higher in urban and industrialised areas (Butler, 2001). However, while in general people tend to support renewable energy generation, when specific infrastructures are deployed in particular – mainly rural – places, opposition is often found (Bell et al., 2005; Devine-Wright, 2005; Toke, Breukers & Wolsink, 2008; Labussière & Nadai, 2018).

An extensive body of social sciences’ research has developed to try and understand the factors underlying such opposition (Wustenhagen, Burer & Wolsink, 2007; Devine-Wright, 2014; Labussière & Nadai, 2018) and, consensually, one of the main dimensions identified as related with people’s responses to energy

infrastructures is their ideas and relations about the spaces and places where they are deployed – often seen by local communities as natural, rural, unspoilt landscapes (van Veelen & Haggett, 2017; Batel et al., 2015; Woods, 2005; Halfacree, 1995). These representations and relations have been discussed as the result of both contextual people-place affective relations – or place attachment (van Veelen & Haggett, 2017; Devine-Wright & Howes, 2010) – and of socio-historical and associated institutional practices – such as the pervasiveness of Romanticism in Britain and its appropriation and reproduction in regulations that have kept the countryside separate from the urban (see Murdoch & Loewe, 2003; Gkartzios & Remoundou 2018). As clearly put by Gkartzios and Remoundou (2018, p.3), “such distinctions founded and further co-produced a particular image of rurality – that of the ‘rural idyll’ (...) more pronounced in England than anywhere else in the UK and western countries, and has provided a normative discourse for contextualising rural social phenomena in the English context”¹.

However, whereas the role of artistic movements, the planning system and also of rural lobby groups in the reproduction of that discourse has been extensively examined (Toke, Breukers & Wolsink, 2008; Murdoch & Loewe, 2003; Cowell, 2010), the role of another important actor in reflecting and shaping people’s ideas and practices about the rural and associated issues in their relation with low carbon energy transitions has been more neglected so far – the media (Devine-Wright et al., 2017). This despite the fact that a body of research illustrating the impact and importance of the media in people’s responses to renewable energy infrastructures has already slowly started to emerge. Devine-Wright (2011) has analysed images of public

¹ This is not to undervalue the relevance of such romantic/idyllic representations of the landscape in other socio-geographical contexts, like in Germany and in the USA, to name but a few (see Phadke, 2011; Hoppe-Kilper & Stainhauser, 2002).

engagement with renewable energy in general within the UK national press in the years 2006-2007 and concluded that albeit images of renewable energy technologies were increasingly being represented alongside the public, these were often representations of a passive public made out of individual supporters. The author emphasizes that this can be seen as delegitimizing opposition. Stephens, Rand & Melnick (2009) have instead focused on USA media representations of wind energy by examining three regional newspapers in states with high wind power deployment but otherwise diverse. The authors discuss how different discourses about wind power emerged from the three newspapers, with Massachusetts emphasizing the aesthetic, cultural, environmental and health and safety risks of wind energy; Texas focusing on wind energy as a business; and Minnesota with a generally positive discourse and framing of risks within the technical and economic domains. Wright & Reid (2011) analysed New York Times' articles on biofuels in the USA and show how the media used symbolically meaningful frames to present biofuels that resonated with dominant cultural values such as economic development, environment and national security frames. In turn, Deignan, Harvey and Hoffman-Goetz (2013) have examined how the mass media in Ontario, Canada, frame the health impacts of wind energy, and highlight how scientific literature presents divergent views on health impacts of turbines from the media. Also Holstead, Galán-Díaz & Sutherland (2017) have examined the coverage of on-farm wind in the UK's farming press in the period 1980-2013. The authors conclude that over time on-farm wind was increasingly discussed within an economic positive frame and that the farming press strategically drew on farmers' beliefs, values and identities – such as the productivist 'good farmer' identity – to foster that positive business view over wind farms (see also Sengers, Raven &

Venrooij, 2010; Heras-Saizarbitoria, Cilleruelo & Zamanillo, 2011; Romanach, Carr-Cornish & Muriuki, 2015).

Overall these studies have demonstrated that the way in which the media portray and discuss renewable energy technologies both reflects and shapes publics' relations with them. Given the importance that representations of the rural and the countryside have on people's opposition to renewable energy infrastructures, particularly onshore wind farms and especially in the UK, the main aim of this paper is to analyse if and in which ways do the media and specifically the British written press give voice to and/or re-present mainstream, traditional representations of the British countryside in its relation with current renewable energy transitions and namely the deployment of onshore wind farms in the UK². For that, we will next review existent literature that has examined and discussed (re-)presentations of the rural and particularly in the UK, for then describing the method used and present the main analyses. Finally, the implications for both social sciences' research and energy policy of the results presented will be discussed.

2. (Re-)presenting the British countryside: A long history with a short past

The development and persistence of a hegemonic representation of the countryside as a 'rural idyll' and the associated urban-rural divide in European and Western culture and, specifically, in the UK (Gkartzios & Remoundou 2018; Silva et al., 2016), has been thoroughly analysed and discussed in social science research in

² Given that this paper examines newspapers with UK-wide dissemination, it will tend to inadequately generalize throughout the paper to the UK as a whole, even if aware that especially since the devolution of the governments to Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, these have their own histories and contexts regarding energy policy and low carbon transitions (Markantoni & Woolvin, 2015; Cowell, 2010).

the last decades. This research has been evidencing that despite that representation being ‘originally’ tied up with the Romantic movement in the XIXth century, it’s reification throughout time has been promoted and co-constructed by artists, governments, planners, and the media alike (Philipps et al., 2001; Murdoch & Lowe, 2003; Woods, 2005; Eriksson, 2010). That research has also been revealing how this representation of the countryside has had specific consequences, such as in the guise of the whitening or de-racialization of the countryside (Neal, 2002; Holloway, 2007); the denial of inequality, poverty and deprivation in rural areas (Silva, 2013; MacKrell & Pemberton, 2018); the rejection of (arguably) post-carbon energy societies (Cowell, 2010; Devine-Wright & Howes, 2010; Batel et al., 2015); and, generally, the creation of moral geographies excluding some social groups and objects in images of rurality, and including others (Jansson, 2013). As Neal (2002, p.443) succinctly puts it, “pastoral images of England – rolling green fields, winding lanes, cream teas, chocolate box villages – have, historically and contemporarily, provided the corner-stones of a specific national identity (see also Rose, 1995; Wallwork & Dixon, 2004; Haigron, 2017). “Real” England is therefore a rural “green and pleasant land” (Halfacree, 1996, p.51; Short, 1991), and should be kept that way, devoid of change and diversity, particularly rejecting those objects and groups associated with the urban, it’s constitutive outside (Neal, 2002; Holloway, 2007; Batel et al., 2015; Lennon & Scott, 2015). In fact, and as clearly put by Woods (2005), whilst the “rural idyll” is ‘just’ a way, among potential others, to re-present the countryside, it has been influential in encouraging people to visit the countryside as tourists, and to move there as in-migrants. Philipps and colleagues (2001) have also pointed out, after examining the constructions of rurality embedded in three British rural drama TV series, that the rural is mainly middle class, therefore simultaneously reflecting and

contributing to the in migration of a certain class type of urban to rural dwellers. These processes have created a so called “consuming idyll” (Jansson, 2013) as part of a broader process of global commodification of the rural, or what has also been designated as ‘McRuralisation’ (Silva, 2013). As suggested by Silva and colleagues (2016), “these very positive representations of the countryside helped trigger new demands and consumptions in rural areas. Such representations of rurality, external generated, have grown progressively detached from the characteristics of rural areas and rurality seems to be ‘deterritorialised’ and ‘delocalised’, leading to the emergence of notions as ‘representational cliché’, ‘virtual rural’, ‘urban rural’ and ‘McRural’ “ (p.79). In turn, this emphasizes that “the hegemony of the ‘rural idyll’ was achieved at least in part because of its amenability to capitalist spatiality” (Halfacree, 1996, p.66).

This ‘deterritorialisation’ of the countryside was recently illustrated by Batel and colleagues (2015) in the context of a study examining local communities’ responses to the construction of new high voltage power lines in the UK, to connect to new energy generation infrastructures, specifically a wind farm and a nuclear power station. Focus groups were conducted with members of local communities living in the vicinity of the energy infrastructures and revealed that one of the main aspects associated with their opposition to those infrastructures was that they were perceived as destroying the essence of the countryside as a natural, pristine, unspoilt landscape. Through this process, which the authors named essentialisation, participants in the focus groups justified their opposition to the construction of any large-scale energy infrastructure in the British countryside. However, in other parts of the focus groups, participants used the hegemonic representation of the British countryside to present the countryside near where they live as more paradigmatic of that representation and therefore as particularly unsuited for the deployment of large-scale energy

infrastructures. As put by some of the participants *I think it* [Montgomeryshire, the county where the participant lives] *is like the greenest county (...) 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* (p.154-155). This illustrates very clearly that not only the representation of the British countryside as the 'rural idyll' is still pervasive nowadays, but also that it is recognised as such, as a hegemonic, valued and thus powerful discourse, useful to be used politically to negotiate the deployment of post-carbon energy generation and associated infrastructures in the countryside and particularly to oppose them near the place where people live.

This example highlights then the importance of considering landscapes as **not only socially and culturally constructed, but also as** political, contested notions, and the outcome of power-laden political processes (Gailing & Leibenath, 2015; Bridge et al., 2013). Research focusing on issues of energy colonialism has been illustrating that clearly as well by showing how narratives of colonial pasts – such as between the urban and the rural (Rudolph & Kierkegaard, 2019), between England and Wales (Batel & Devine-Wright, 2018), between the UK and Ireland (Lennon & Scott, 2015) – resurface in practices of post-carbon energy landscapes and shape people's relations with these. Lennon and Scott (2015) examined discourses from Irish based actors on proposals for wind projects in Ireland resulting from the Irish-UK intergovernmental agreement to export renewable energy from Ireland to the UK. The authors demonstrate how participants draw historical parallels between the current neo-colonial exploitation and dispossession imposed by these wind farms, and their forefathers fight for their land, for Irish independence from the UK. In a related way, Rudolph & Kierkegaard (2019) showed how the stigma associated with rural areas in

Denmark as deprived, poor, isolated, is discursively appropriated and used by wind farms developers to justify the deployment of wind farms in rural areas which, in turn, often contributes to further marginalise rural communities. The authors importantly discuss place and territorial stigma and reputation, promoting the discussion on how discursive constructions over those can be used differently by different actors to either present rural areas as in need of economic development or instead as in need of environmental protection and restoration.

All in all, the above discussed research highlights the relevance of further exploring how rurality(ies) are interpreted and presented in/for a post-carbon world (Lennon & Scott, 2015) and with what consequences. In a related way, this research also clearly highlights that often more important than how those ruralities are presented is who presents them in a given way and their power to put forward certain discourses over renewable energy, rural areas and the countryside, instead of others. As discussed previously, the media is (still) nowadays a powerful actor in so called western societies in producing and shaping the consumption of environmental meanings and meanings over people-environment relations (Burgess, 1990). We will now analyse UK's press re-presentations of rurality in its relation with wind farms in the period 2008-2014.

3. METHOD

Three UK national newspapers were selected for analysis in order to cover both more left wing and right wing newspapers and also a range of both reference and

tabloid newspapers³. Following these criteria, the selected newspapers were the Guardian (reference, left-wing), the Times (reference, right-wing), and the Sun (tabloid, right-wing) – see O’Neill, 2013.

The first criterion followed for selecting the data from the newspapers, was the time range 2008-2014, following the Renewables Directives 2009 and up to the year before the project within which this study was developed, started. Then several search terms were chosen that related with wind farms⁴, namely: Wind Power; Wind Sources; Wind Energy, Wind Farms, Wind Turbines, Wind Mills; Wind Projects; and other associated ones.

We then developed a search using Lexis Nexis. As the number of articles was quite high (N=38051), we reduced the size of the sample by using three criteria: removing duplicates; guaranteeing relevance; and ensuring the feasibility of the analysis. First, we selected a random and representative sample of the articles by selecting only every 10th article (with the results organized by date, from the newest to the oldest – see Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004). Of these articles any duplicates were eliminated. Then, we followed a relevance criterion, deleting any article that was not at all related with the search (i.e., with wind farms). This resulted in a more manageable sample size (N= 234). The last step was to identify all the articles that besides wind farms also discussed terms related with the rural, countryside and others, as identified in existent relevant literature (see Halfacree, 1995; van Dam et al., 2002; Baylina & Berg, 2010; Gkartzios & Remoundou, 2018). These terms included:

³ Newspapers’ political orientation in media analysis has been pointed out as relevant, because traditionally, at least in Anglo-Saxon contexts, left leaning newspapers have been more supportive of measures to mitigate climate change, such as renewable energy; whereas right leaning newspapers have been less supportive of those or even advocating climate change scepticism (see Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004; O’Neill, 2013).

⁴ The focus of the analysis was wind farms and not other non-carbon energy generation technologies because this is the main way in which post-carbon energy transitions have been materialising so far in the UK (see Bell et al., 2005; Toke et al., 2008).

agriculture; community; countryside; farming; farmland; fields; green; idyll; landscape; natural; pastoral; quiet; rural; tranquil; village; visual; and wildlife.

Data analysis was performed through the software Atlas.ti v.5.2, a software just used to organize and help analyse the data through the following methods. At the initial stage, a Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was performed. This first stage allowed us to identify the main themes organising media discourses about the rural, which are identified in the bullet points of the Analyses section below. After this, a second, more fine-grained discursive rhetorical analysis (see Billig, 1991; also Batel et al., 2015), was 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 (for more information on the data analysis methods, see Batel & Castro, 2018).

4. ANALYSES⁵

a. The rural idyll: Britain’s green and pleasant land

The deployment of wind farms in the British countryside, on one hand, is clearly used to corroborate and help reproduce representations of the rural as reified in

⁵ In the extracts to be presented, the use of single underline aims to highlight the parts of the quotations that will be focused in the analyses, whereas the use of bold intends to highlight other important but more secondary aspects of the analyses. The quotations presented follow good practice in doing discursive analysis (e.g., Antaki et al., 2003), namely, the extracts presented aim to be the most paradigmatic of the discourses of the media and of associated socio-psychological, cultural and political processes.

the last centuries – Britain’s green and pleasant land. This is illustrated in the extracts below:

Extracts n.1:

(a) *We’ve had to put up with the march of these ugly, useless, subsidised triffids all over our green and pleasant land* [The Sun, P272]

(b) *“Enough is enough”, he said. “We can no longer have wind turbines imposed on communities. I can’t singlehandedly build a new Jerusalem but I can protect our green and pleasant land”, he added* [The Times, P679]

(c) *It [a wind turbine] will fundamentally alter the landscape and profoundly impact on the quality and tranquillity of the South Downs* [The Guardian, P545]

(d) *Earmuffs Joan retired to her idyllic retreat in 1986 – but claims her peace was shattered last year when the windfarm was erected* [The Sun, P223]

The use of this metonymy – *our green and pleasant land* – as illustrated in extracts 1a. and 1b. is very frequent in media discourses on the rural, and mainly on those presented by more right-wing papers, such as The Sun and The Times. Whereas metonymies such as this one are more often used to refer to the British countryside, discourses that further elaborate on the characteristics of the British countryside (Batel et al., 2015) are also frequent, such as exemplified in extract 1c. and 1d. above. As described by Halfacree (1995), hegemonic representations of the British rural include dimensions of quietness, tranquillity, peace and relaxation, which seem to express the ethos of the countryside (p.7), and which are presented as being *fundamentally altered* (extract 1b.) by the deployment of wind farms. Extract 1d. also evidences how the ‘McRuralisation’ of the countryside (Silva et al., 2016) is often

enacted by urban to rural migrants (also Philipps et al., 2001). This concurs with the analyses of Batel and colleagues (2015) on the essentialisation of the countryside, who have extensively illustrated how the countryside is re-presented as having a completely different essence from large-scale energy infrastructures that are therefore seen as incompatible with the essence of the rural.

However, and also in accordance with other authors (e.g., Wallwork & Dixon, 2004; Woods, 2005), the extracts just showed also highlight that more than the British countryside being reified in media discourses as natural, unspoilt and untouched, it is presented in those discourses as the symbol or materialization of British identity. The use of *our* in the metonymy just discussed, clearly illustrates that. This is further exemplified below:

Extracts n.2:

(a) *No less important is the extent to which the landscape of the **English** counties has been protected from sprawl. You can drive across vast tracts of North America and never be out of sight of a house but **in England wholly rural** views exist in every county. In Bristol, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle you are within a 15 minutes' drive of some of the loveliest country in the world amid a landscape of arable pasture and woodland. To many people, including those who live in the big cities, this is **not just** the beauty of **England** but its very soul* [The Times, P675]

(b) *We need nuclear **to wash ourselves clean of “green” targets that are crippling both our national grid and our beautiful countryside**. (...) When Cam goes to Brussels for that re-negotiation, he needs to add “energy” to “immigration” and “national law” as unbreakable demands.* [The Sun, P272]

The extracts just presented reveal three important dimensions of media discourses on the rural in its relation with the deployment of wind farms. First, how the perceived transformation fostered by the deployment of wind farms in the countryside is seen as not only changing this *wholly rural* (extract 2a.) landscape, but Britain itself, its *very soul* (extract 2a.). This is quite clearly put in extract 2b., which emphasizes that *to many people, including those who live in big cities*, the countryside *is not just the beauty of England but its very soul*. So it really is not only related with an aesthetic dimension (*our beautiful countryside* – extract 2b), but also with an identity, nationalistic one (as again highlighted by the repeated use of *our* in extract 2b). This becomes even clearer by comparing the British countryside with the countryside in other regions in the world, to state that rural Britain has *some of the loveliest country in the world* (extract 2a.), therefore offering an interpretation of the rural which only makes sense in the context of nation-states and associated intergroup relations and imagined communities (Anderson, 1982; Batel & Devine-Wright, 2018). This is also evidenced by the second dimension that these extracts illustrate, namely how media re-presentations of the rural also reproduce associated representations of historical intergroup relations and related narratives – such as about the relation between England and Britain, and Britishness (and the British countryside) as still mainly Englishness (and the English countryside – extract 2a.) – see Neal, 2002; Woods, 2005.

Finally, extract 2b also clearly illustrates the relationality between energy systems and other social issues (Labussière & Nadai, 2018; also Batel & Devine-Wright, 2018) by accentuating how issues of stopping immigration, securing national sovereignty and keeping carbon intensive energy systems, come hand in hand. This further illustrates the point made by Neal (2002) in that there has been “some

evidence that far-right organizations have begun to focus on the countryside, as a ‘last place of Englishness’” (p.444) and, with it, pulling together conservative and nationalist positions regarding energy transitions, migration and the European Union (see also Batel & Devine-Wright, 2018). This is also evident in the first extract below, where politicians from UK’s Conservative party are presented as normally opposing *huge turbines near homes and beauty spots*:

Extracts n.3:

(a) *Osborne will slash funding for wind farms across the countryside after protests from Tory MPs. The Chancellor has ordered taxpayers’ cash to be redirected away from land –based turbines towards those offshore. It means fewer wind farms could ultimately be built on **UK soil** – but dozens of planned projects will still go ahead. The move was welcomed by **rural campaigners and Tory MPs** who oppose huge turbines near homes and beauty spots* [The Sun, P58].

(b) *He says people might react badly to having **the country’s landscape scarred** just to meet another country’s carbon targets* [The Times, P768]

Extract 3a. puts side by side Tory MPs and rural campaigners as generally opposing wind farms to be built in *UK soil (...)* *near homes and beauty spots*. Interestingly, it seems to suggest that offshore wind farms do not menace the countryside, *UK soil* and *UK homes and beauty spots*, at least not to the same extent that onshore wind farms do, therefore suggesting that Britain’s identity is materialized in onshore landscapes, as suggested before. This is reinforced in extract 3b. that reifies the *country’s landscape* as being onshore. This last extract also interestingly highlights in a very explicit way the so called ‘green on green’ dilemma (Warren et

al., 2005), by highlighting how people might give preference to avoid the *country's landscape* being *scarred* by onshore wind farms vs. achieving the *country's carbon targets* as fostered by energy policies.

Extract 3a. also highlights another important dimension of media discourses on the rural in the analyses – that the rural is mainly portrayed as an homogenous whole and a static, passive one (see also Markantoni & Woolvin, 2015). This is evidenced in the way the rural and the countryside are essentialised as demonstrated in Extracts 1 and 2 before, but also in how *rural campaigners* (extract 3a.), *rural communities* (extract 4a.) and *rural areas* (extract 4b.) are presented, as a cohesive, homogenous whole:

Extracts n.4:

(a) *The energy target for Scotland was to produce 50 per cent of output from renewables by 2020. Since then, the target has doubled, to the consternation of many rural communities* [The Times, P985]

(b) *The prime minister came under pressure from more than 100 backbench MPs, who wrote to him demanding action against wind farms spoiling the landscape in rural areas.* [The Guardian, P467]

The rural is presented, in extracts n.4 but also in the ones above, as the passive backdrop to beautiful landscapes and as static, just dynamic and amenable to change by human hands. In this vein, these analyses reveal that it is still mainly a representation of the rural as an idyll, or as Silva and colleagues (2016) put it, a delocalised representational cliché, that shapes media discourses. An exception was found in the following extract, in which the impact of human action upon the

countryside is explicitly acknowledged with a rhetoric function - that of emphasizing that the changes brought to the countryside by wind farms are not comparable with any other human driven changes that happened before:

Extracts n.5:

(a) *Britain's landscape has never before been subject to such visual transformation. Human hands have always refashioned the country, urban and rural alike, but they have not industrialised its appearance on remotely this scale. Roads, railway lines, quarries, even towns and cities, are inconspicuous compared to wind turbines. Few of Britain's greatest views will be free of the sight of them* [The Guardian, P378]

Extract 5a. highlights then that *even towns and cities* – the rural's historical constitutive outside (Lennon & Scott, 2015; Halfacree, 1995) – *are inconspicuous compared to wind turbines*. It seems then to suggest that despite opposition to wind farms often being presented in the public sphere and by research as another manifestation of the urban vs. rural divide (Cowell, 2010; Batel et al., 2015), it might be worth to also explore it as more than, or different from, what has traditionally characterised that divide.

b. Contesting the rural idyll: Negotiating ruralities

So far, we have seen that the deployment of wind farms in rural areas has been extensively used by the British press to reproduce and further reify the essentialisation of the British countryside as a rural idyll and the materialization of national identity, and therefore of the rural as in need of protection in order to remain unchanged, unspoilt, pristine. However, these post-carbon energy transitions were also used to

rearticulate and create new relations and representations of the rural. Alternative representations were often productivist (Silva et al., 2016), presenting onshore wind farms as enabling another way of farming and thus a re-enactment of the rural as productive and offering a living in nowadays societies:

Extracts n.6:

- (a) *Hopes wind power will bring in cash to farming communities* [The Times, P727]
- (b) *He said such projects [wind farms] could make the rural sector in Scotland a “hell of a heap of money”* [The Sun, P199]

The extracts above highlight the potential of wind farms to bring money to *farming communities* and, with it, economically support the *rural sector* (see also Markantoni & Woolvin, 2015). These discourses feed into the results of Holstead and colleagues (2017) regarding the discourses of the British farming press on onshore wind farms, in which a dominant ‘productivist good farmer’ discourse was found, to foster a positive business view over wind farms. However, whereas these discourses might be seen as being positive towards the deployment of wind farms and post-carbon energy transitions, they also seem to offer a representation of the rural as intrinsically deprived and in need of economic development, which can be a way of stigmatising rural areas and legitimizing further stigmatising practices in those – such as the construction of wind farms (see Rudolph & Kierkegaard, 2019).

In turn, other alternative representations, also less frequent, seemed to foster what Batel and colleagues (2015) have called the de-essentialisation of the British countryside, but to support the deployment of wind farms in general, rather than to

oppose them near the countryside where people live. This is illustrated in the examples below:

Extracts n.7:

(a) *One of the town's councillors wrote: "The Ardrossan wind farm has been overwhelmingly accepted by local people – instead of spoiling the landscape, we believe it has been enhanced. The turbines are impressive looking, bring a calming effect to the town and, contrary to the believe that they would be noisy, we have found them to be silent workhorses"* [The Guardian, P339]

(b) *The truth? There wasn't that much noise. The shallow valley that the turbines were in wasn't that pretty, and if anything the slender shapes gave a rather nice focal point in the landscape. So if not there, where? And if not wind, what? If you don't think **this is just Nimbysim** then just ask yourself this, as you look at the telegraph poles and pylons in Devon. **Has the turbines been proposed as the only way to bring electricity to the residents, do you imagine many would have objected?*** [The Times, P728]

(c) *He said wind turbines were becoming necessary "symbols of the age we live in" and that **countryside groups should spend more time finding places turbines should go rather than opposing each one*** [The Guardian, P545]

The extracts just presented illustrate discourses that show support towards the deployment of wind farms, but in a rhetorically interesting way, as they do so while recognising the expected opposition to wind farms and the reasons normally given for that. As such, they engage in a relevant way with three of the main dimensions that

have shaped the discussion over the deployment of onshore wind farms in the public sphere (see Devine-Wright, 2005; Wustenhagen et al., 2007). First, they contest some of the main factors that have been identified as being associated with opposition, namely the visual impact/impact on the landscape and the noise caused by turbines. Extracts 7a.-7c. highlight that turbines are *symbols of the age we live in*, and *enhanced* and gave *a rather nice focal point to the landscape* that *wasn't that pretty* anyway; and revealed themselves to be *silent workhorses* – a metaphor which, again, emphasizes the vision of the rural as productive and wind farms as another way of farming – and that *there wasn't that much noise*. As illustrated before by Devine-Wright & Howes (2010), these discourses do suggest then that responses to the deployment of onshore wind farms are also strongly associated with how they are seen as fitting particular places and landscapes, not only at cultural and institutional levels, but also at more affective, contextual ones (see also Cowell, 2010; van Veelen & Haggett, 2017).

A second dimension interestingly highlighted by the extracts above is how they engage not only with re-presentations of the rural – as open to change, as productive, as hybrid - but also with re-presentations of opposition to the deployment of onshore wind farms in the rural. Extract 7b. explicitly refers to that as *just Nimbyism*, while recognising that for post-carbon energy transitions to take place, someone has to deal with their impacts. This same focus and discussion on devising acceptable locations to wind farms (instead of discussing if wind farms themselves should be deployed) is also emphasized in extract 7c., which also interestingly represents opposition as mainly related to *countryside groups* which, in the UK case, have indeed been pointed out as one of the main reasons for the lack of deployment of onshore wind farms (Toke et al., 2008). Finally, another interesting dimension

highlighted in the extracts just presented is illustrated by extract 7b.: the adoption of a relational perspective in the re-presentation of the rural in its relation with the deployment of wind farms, by recognising the importance of wind farms for generating electricity to rural residents.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Analyses of discourses and representations of the rural and their consequences, and specifically in Britain, have been an already long interest of social science research (Halfacree, 1995; Neal, 2002; Woods, 2005; Silva et al., 2016). The same can be said of the analysis of people's – local communities, citizens in general, developers - discourses and representations of post-carbon energy transitions and, particularly, of onshore wind farms in Britain and elsewhere (Devine-Wright, 2005; Wustenhagen et al., 2007; Cowell, 2010; Labussière & Nadai, 2018). However, few studies have so far examined media's re-presentations of those issues and, specifically, of the rural, in the context of post-carbon energy transitions. This paper aimed to contribute to address that neglect, by analysing the British press (the Guardian, the Times and the Sun) discourses on the deployment of onshore wind farms during the period 2008-2014. The analyses can be summarised in two main observations.

First, dominant representations in the British press and mainly in more traditionally right-wing oriented newspapers – the Times and the Sun – still largely reproduce and further reify the image of the British countryside as unspoilt, natural, pristine, and in need of preservation for aesthetic use. Nevertheless, analyses also showed some important dimensions of that discourse that might be useful to further

research in the future. One of them is that the rural is mainly portrayed as passive, as static, non-relational and non-transitional (Labussière & Nadai, 2018). This separation of the rural from the urban, from the human-made, seems to be further accentuated by the deployment of wind farms that are presented as particularly destroying the countryside and the associated British (English) identity. In so being, these analyses highlight that the rural seems to be appropriated within this dominant representation in a very anthropocentric way, through which humans are seen as needed to protect and preserve a certain nature (Castree, 2014). In future research, it would be relevant then to further explore how people re-present relationships between humans and nature within this green on green dilemma (Warren et al., 2005). It would be relevant as well to better examine the possibilities for contestation of the dominant representation of the British countryside as mainly white upper middle-class (Knowles, 2008; Tyler, 2008), in its relation with low carbon energy transitions. Another interesting dimension highlighted by the analyses here presented is that the rural and rural communities are often presented as homogenous and as where positions and decisions regarding post-carbon energy transitions should be taken. Whereas this perspective follows the principles of some environmental policies such as those embedded in the slogan ‘think global, act local’ and might potentiate the advantages of a certain ‘positive parochialism’ (Devine-Wright, Smith & Batel, 2019), it also not only reinforces the urban vs rural divide – which, as discussed, contributes to the essentialisation of the countryside - but contributes as well to further remove post-carbon energy transitions decision-making from any other realm rather than the rural. In turn, and as has been discussed by some authors, this can arguably be considered as one of the main factors contributing to a disarticulated, non-relational view of energy

systems (Labussière & Nadaï, 2018) and people's associated lack of engagement with or indifference to energy issues (Bell et al., 2005; Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015).

The second main observation that can be taken from the analyses presented, is that despite being evidently less frequent, alternative discourses were also presented by the British press and mainly re-presenting the countryside not as the static and passive aesthetic backdrop to people's lives, but as a way of living from the land, another way of farming – and the presentation of wind farms as 'silent workhorses' and a 'symbol of the age we live in' are paradigmatic of that. This re-presentation of the rural comes also often associated with the rural as deprived and in need of economic development, which can also be the basis of the stigmatisation of the rural by forcing upon it, based on that re-presentation, wind farms that rural communities themselves might not want (see Rudolph & Kierkegaard, 2019). Some of these alternative discourses also seemed to be aware of the importance of finding acceptable locations to the deployment of wind farms in rural areas, given the relationality of energy, landscape and territorial issues, especially in countries like the UK in which despite the hegemonic discourse on the need to protect the British countryside, a pervasive ethos of 'keeping the lights on' also exists (Bridge et al., 2013; Platform, 2013).

These analyses contributed then to start exploring and revealing the non-quantifiable cultural dimensions of energy policy (Lennon & Scott, 2015) in the British countryside, and, as such, hint at important axes to be pursued by research and policy making alike for a better understanding of the role of new post-carbon energy landscapes in re-interpretations and appropriations of the rural. One of them, and as mentioned before, is the relationality and transitionality (Labussière & Nadaï, 2018) of energy systems, territories and landscapes. As some of the media discourses

highlighted, not only people in general, citizens, should be more aware of it, but also energy policy itself, in that it should more explicitly recognise and take into account that energy policy is not only about energy but also about space and place, different-level identities and associated representations (Bridge et al., 2013; van Veelen & Haggett, 2017; Batel & Devine-Wright, 2018). It is therefore important that energy policy addresses and engages the citizens of a country as much as local communities; the energy system as much as the planning one; the fostering of post-carbon energy transitions as much as the fostering of people's relations with space and place. In an associated way, these analyses highlight the importance of energy policy to actively foster – through policy-making, the media, developers - re-imaginings of the rural within post-carbon energy transitions, where all of those issues and dimensions are taken into account. It is only through permeating the public sphere with alternative, post-carbon energy transitions, discourses that powerful actors in reflecting and shaping public discourses, like the media, will start using more frequently those alternative discourses as well – maybe, like Ali Smith, talking about England's green unpleasant land, and all the exclusions that come with it.

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