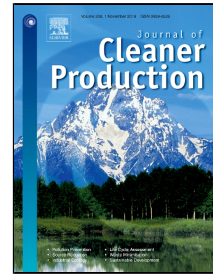


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The uncertain games of energy transition in the island of Sardinia (Italy)

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Abstract

Energy is a basic issue for cleaner production and more sustainable consumption. A transition to renewable sources and massive energy savings face several problems: technological lock-ins, energy companies' oligopoly, unsteadily governments' policies. These problems are especially severe in small island developing states or regions. For these territories, however, energy transition can be a chance to improve their situation, especially if they are rich of renewable sources and they can mobilise important cultural and organisational resources, such as claims for identity and autonomy. An exemplary case study is Sardinia, the second biggest island in the Mediterranean Sea. It has problems of energy supply, strained political relationships with the mainland, and low economic development. The framework for this case study is rooted in multilevel perspective and political economy, complemented by games playing metaphor. The research hypothesis is that sustainable energy practices emerge if a variety of 'games' are visible, if they stimulate lay people participation, and if they are consistent with key goals for islanders, including independence, development and identity. In Sardinia, three games are identified: fossil fuels vs. renewables, competition on smart grid and storage system technologies, energy sovereignty vs. energy interdependency. There is not a single result of these games. Variable situations emerge, which allow forecasting a very slow progress of the energy transition.

Key words: energy transition, islands, southern Europe, independence, development

1. The issue and the frameworks

1.1 Energy problems in islands. Cleaner energy production represents the main means of tackling climate change. The challenge is to combine an energy efficient industry with more sober consumptions (Dovì et al., 2009; Karunathilake et al., 2018). However, a transition to renewable sources and massive energy savings face several problems: strong technological lock-ins (Koster and Anderies, 2013), restraining interests of oil and gas industries (Gupta, 2017) and reduced investments in poorer regions (Bouzarovski and Tirado Herrero, 2017; Pellerin-Carlin, 2017). These problems are the most severe in islands that are far from

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