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Title: Emergence and evolution of ‘protest’ actors in rural territories: the case of the development of the Wind Energy Plan in the Region of Valencia (Spain)¹

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Abstract

The region of Valencia has a marked territorial duality: an urbanised, populated and high-income coastal line, and mountain and depressed inland rural areas. This territorial duality also derives in a functional duality, so that market and regulation drivers seem to assign rural areas specific roles for the provision of raw materials, energy, water, and the like. One of the clearest examples can be found in the design and development of the Wind Energy Plan passed by the Regional Government in 2001, which designated areas for the installation of windmills. However, this regulation has resulted in an outstanding emergence of associations that have organised at several levels (from the local to the national) as a strong opposition movement to the local developments of the Plan.

With this background, the objective of this paper is to analyse, from a set of case studies, the processes of emergence and the evolution of collective actors (associations) which have been arising in many rural areas as a response to the local applications of the Wind Energy Plan. The comparative analysis allows to identify both similarities and differences among the processes that have been taking place, as well as the factors explaining such differences. In this regard, especial attention is paid to the linkage between the evolution of these collective actors and their involvement into the participatory mechanisms in a context of multilevel governance: from the local to the European level.

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1. Introduction

The way rural areas are governed has changed deeply in the last century, where forces of centralisation and decentralisation have played an outstanding role. Last changes in rural politics are partly a consequence of the major shifts that have occurred in rural areas linked to the new demands placed on the countryside and therefore to the different relationships and roles that rural areas can play in our societies (Marsden and Murdoch, 1998). These demands have been accompanied by the decline of agriculture as the central activity in rural areas, and constitute the starting point of a wide range of processes based on the competition for rural space (Lowe et al., 1993). These changes that affect the political, social and economic spheres of the countryside respond to the restructuring of rural areas and lead to a differentiation of rural space (Marsden et al., 1993). This paper tackles an example of non-agricultural rural restructuring, the production of wind energy in rural areas of Valencia. We analyse how the irruption of this type of activity generates a conflict that modifies the politics of specific rural areas and represents a “*symbolic battle over rurality*” (Mormont, 1990).

The region of Valencia is a territory with a distinct duality, the hinterlands, which are sparsely populated and mountainous areas; and the coastline, highly urbanized and populated, being the area that generates most of the economic growth of the region. This duality leads to different linkages between the territories influenced by social demands and the roles or functions that each space can play within the region. The possible functions of each area are mediated largely by the regulations affecting land uses, a regulation that is established at great extent at the level of the regional government. Indeed, along the last decade the Valencian Regional Government is within a process of designing and delivering of several norms and regulations regarding land planning. In this process several regional plans have been approved, among them the ‘Wind Energy Plan’ (WEP).

The development of the WEP has fuelled the emergence of collective actors in rural areas pursuing to preserve the rural space. Through this mobilisation we can observe different representations of rurality and diverse attempts to impose them participating and modifying governance mechanisms of Valencian rural areas.

The establishment of windfarms in rural areas has generated different types of analysis in the field of rural studies. In this paper we focus on how the development of the WEP has constituted a locally-based representation arena, where collective actors have emerged as a response to the way the regional government has been using the governance mechanisms. In order to tackle this analysis, firstly we present briefly the theoretical underpinning of our study highlighting elements of the literature about governance and social movements. Secondly, we describe the evolution of the ‘Wind Energy Plan’ at the regional level. The reaction at the local level will be analysed through the study of three social movement organisations mobilising against the WEP in three different localities. In these case studies we will look at how the different collective actors emerge and build alliances, highlighting their mobilisation strategies. The description of the case studies would lead to a discussion around how the rules established by the planning system have been threaten by a new social movement; namely, the changes that collective actors have introduced in the way that Valencian rural areas are governed.

This paper stems from a research based on textual analysis of secondary data and recorded semi-structured interviews of anti-WEP organisation members. The secondary data includes the different laws, regulations and plans related to the installation of windmills in Valencia; written submissions made by the different organizations; newspapers reports published in press; and different material published on the websites of the anti-WEP organisations and their supporters as well as websites of the regional government.

2. Theoretical framework

The construction of windmills in Valencia in the frame of the WEP shows the struggle over the conception of rurality and over the conception of governance itself. The analysis of the public attitudes of the different actors participating in conflicts generated by the construction of windfarms has been tackled by different scholars, covering for example studies about local opinion (Krohn and Damborg, 1999), connecting these discourses with socioeconomic characteristics and drawing political implications (Devine-Wright, 2005), analysing the social gap as the void between the high public

support for wind energy and its low installation (Bell et al., 2005) or denying a ‘Not In My Backyard’ (NIMBY) phenomena to explain the opposition to wind farms and instead enhancing equity and justice reasons (Wolsink, 2000, 2007) or a ‘periphery’ – ‘centre’ conflict (Zografos and Martínez-Alier, 2009). Other scholars concerned about the study of the discourses or identities underpinning the support or opposition to the windmills, have enhanced the importance of the theoretical aspects as well as the use of social science concepts and methods to tackle this topic (see for example: Devine-Wright, 2005; Ellis et al., 2007). In this regard there are recent studies that try to grasp the subjectivities around the differing public attitudes towards wind farms, most of them based on discourse analysis. For instance Woods (2003a) analyses the discourses around wind farm development considering the different conceptions about nature (landscape) and rurality, and how the actors involved in the conflict are able to build alliances regarding these conceptions.

The analysis of the discourses around wind power implementation often raise issues of government and governance, related to who takes decisions and how are they taken. In recent years the concept of *governance* has grown in importance, although it has taken some time until this literature has imbued the rural studies field (Goodwin, 1998). Part of this revival is related with the “need to distinguish between ‘governance’ and ‘government’”. Thus governance would refer to the modes and manner of governing, government to the institutions and agents charged with governing, and governing to the act of governing itself” (Jessop, 1998, pp. 30 original emphasis). Broadly speaking, governance “refers to: a *new* process of governing; or a *changed* condition of ordered rule; or the *new* method by which society is governed” (Rhodes, 2007, pp. 1246 original emphasis).

In order to deepen into the concept, several authors (see for example: Rhodes, 2007; Stoker, 1998) describe some characteristics of governance drawing upon the assumption that governance is about governing in and through networks. We stress the following traits from this literature: i) governance involves a certain degree of autonomy from the state, constituting self-governing networks of actors; ii) but there are interdependence relations or power dependence between organizations in order to achieve goals, contributing to blurring the limits and responsibilities of the actors involved; iii) these

relations are not based on the exert of power from the government, instead the interactions are built upon trust relations and the rules of the game previously agreed by the participants. From this conception of governance, in land development related conflicts, we can distinguish two main topics with regard to the modes of governing. On one hand the role of the *planning system* and its mechanisms, that is, how it delivers a specific way of governing space; and on the other hand the emergence of actors that engage into *collective action* (associations, social movements, etc.) to protest against a specific development and become part of the governance network.

2.1 Governance and the planning system

The study of the relations between local planning conflicts, the structure of the planning system and its linkages with broader debates about the changing nature of the state and governance have been gaining consideration in recent research (Cowell, 2007). The interest on analyzing the conflict from this perspective relies on unfolding the power structures that sustain the planning system, understanding how the hierarchical relations are constructed and contested, and under what conditions or which factors influence them. Therefore, the work carried out under this frame pretends to consider, but also to move beyond, the different types of planning and obviously, analyze local planning conflicts related to a diversity of land uses emerging in rural communities (see for example: Abram et al., 1996; Cowell and Murdoch, 1999).

The importance of the regulation, that might take the form of land use planning, is also highlighted in the rural restructuring approach as “cause and product of a contested social space” (Marsden et al., 1993) and of the relations established in it. Actually, the regulation is also considered in analytical terms as a ‘representation arena’ where different actors represent themselves politically, negotiating their perceptions about rural space (Lowe et al., 1993). Hence the planning system is a frame to unfold the power relations between the actors participating in a specific conflict and the discourses they hold about rurality and governance; and also affects directly the activities developed in rural areas.

2.2 Governance and social movements

Plans or projects affecting rural land uses often generate local conflicts that can derive in protest **movements**, and the 'Wind Energy Plan' of the region of Valencia is not an exception. These territorial conflicts are part of the wider process of social and economic restructuring occurring in rural areas that has affected the own conception of rurality and therefore impacting over the power relations governing the countryside. These processes represent a major change, that Woods (2003b) describes as "a shift from 'rural politics' to a 'politics of the rural'. Whilst the former is defined as politics located in rural space, or relating to rural issues, the latter is defined by the centrality of the meaning and regulation of rurality itself as the primary focus of conflict and debate". These changes allow the emergence of grassroots movements that contest the implementation of specific activities in concrete locations, inspired in different representations of rurality (Woods, 2008). The study of this type of social movements has evolved over time and has been enriched by different disciplines tackling the analysis of collective action. Among the different research carried on in this field, Della Porta and Diani (1999) extract four defining characteristics of social movements shared by the different theoretical backgrounds, considering social movements as:

“(1) informal networks, based (2) on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about (3) conflictual issues, through (4) the frequent use of various forms of protest” (Della Porta and Diani, 1999, pp.17)

Social movements are constituted by informal networks, but furthermore, their characteristics and development is influenced by – and also influence - social networks in which they participate. Understanding these social networks as "...those systems of relationships which connect the sphere of the actor (whether an individual or an organization) to that of broader dynamics , and which, in the process, enable new interpretations of reality to develop, new solidarities to emerge and new potential for conflict to be transformed into collective action” (Della Porta and Diani, 1999, pp.110)

These systems of relationships, in which supporters of a specific movement can be embedded in, take different forms. Some of them are generated in other collective experiences and others are private in nature, for instance:

- Personal relationships of the supporters of a movement.
- Multiple affiliations of members of a social movement that creates linkages between different organizations.
- Inter-organisational connections due to the share of interests and the creation of alliances to face a common problem or conflict.

The configuration of these networks depends on the context where they are operating, constituting an important linkage between the social movement and its social environment. For example, Della Porta and Diani (1999) state that in local networks usually the integration and density of relationships is higher due to a limited availability of resources in their context. However, not only social networks can be conceptualized as a precondition for collective action, but also they can be interpreted as an outcome of action, that is purposely undertaken after an assessment of its expected benefits and costs.

It is necessary to highlight inside this literature the concept of ‘new social movements’. According to Della Porta and Diani, that draw upon work of Offe, new social movements are characterized by “an open, fluid organization, an inclusive and non-ideological participation, and greater attention to social than to economic transformations” (Della Porta and Diani, 1999, pp.12). Therefore, these ‘new social movements’ differ from the ‘old social movements’ in aspects such as the importance of collective goals in front of individual ones, or the prevalence of symbolic aspects and identity over materialistic aspects, ideological stances or class (Woods, 2003b). Then we can consider ‘new social movements’ in rural areas as a symbol of change, and through its study we can analyze the change in rural power structures and also rural futures can be outlined (Woods, 2008); hence considering the rural conflict related to a development project, such as a wind farm project, as representing the battle over rurality (Mormont, 1990).

3. The Wind Energy Plan (WEP)

The 'Wind Energy Plan' (WEP) of the Region of Valencia was passed by the regional government on July 26 2001, with the aim of promoting the development of windfarms in the Valencia territory. The WEP foresaw the construction of 40 parks with 2,750 windmills to produce 1,650 Mw. Estimated investment was around 12,000 millions of Euros.

The WEP designated 15 concrete areas for the installation of windfarms, all of them with a ceiling in terms of number of mills and power generated. All the designated areas were inland and mountainous rural areas. In this sense, zoning constitutes a process of resource specification, since it differentiates between areas where wind will become a productive asset, and areas where it will not. Hence, specification has an institutional nature, i.e. resources do not become specific because of their climatic or environmental conditions, but because the creation of a new institutional framework which shapes a new system of restrictions and habilitations (Schmid, 2005).

The WEP also delimited the competences between the regional and the local levels of administrative decision making. In this regard, it is the regional administration which designated areas and decided about the projects presented. The only 'decision power' acknowledged to local administrations is related to the granting of public work licenses for the carrying out of projects.

Due to the medium-term high profitability of investments, the development of the WEP became an attractive option of Spanish electric companies, as well as for some companies from the construction sector. In most cases, companies from both types reached agreements for presenting tenders.

When the regional government opened the call for tenders (2003), these companies rapidly submitted their projects for the construction of the several planned windfarms. Once the projects were initially approved by the regional administration, the process of public participation began.

Indeed, projects were subjected at public exposition. For many organizations, citizens, and even local administrations, this was the first information about the existence of projects, as well as about their details (location, number and characteristics of mills,

etc.). This is the moment when the regional plan became locally specified showing the local implications of the generation of wind power.

Therefore, this public exposition often constituted the starting point for social mobilization against windfarms in the local areas, thus influencing the progressive emergence of the protest movements. In the 15 areas affected there has been a contestation that varies from an intense and constant activity to short-lived associations where only the individual actions of directly affected people remain. However in most of the 15 areas there has been a social mobilization that has derived to an organized protest led by different types of organizations (in brackets the three case studies depicted in this paper):

- Platforms or associations that arise from the unification of other previous local associations or from people engaged in other local associations (*Plataforma para la Defensa y Protección de la Sierra de Chiva*)
- Platforms or associations that arise from the participation of individuals not previously involved in other organisations (*La Coordinadora d' Estudis Eòlics del Comtat*)
- Associations that are involved in other issues such as ecologists movements (*Ecologists in action – La Serrania*)

Projects' public exposition also meant the beginning of the period for the presentation of submissions by interested individuals, organizations and administrations. It is precisely within these submissions where the arguments put forward by these movements to try to stop or modify the projects appear more clearly. In this regards, two types of arguments can be distinguished.

Firstly, many initial submissions presented were directly focused on the core arguments, i.e. the real motives of people to be against the projects. These arguments can be classified as:

- The impact of the projects on the **economic development perspectives** of affected rural areas. The point is that the construction of windfarms could provoke effects (visual, noise, 'image' the area throws) affecting negatively other economic activities. In this sense, it is striking the symbolic value of rural

tourism; many submissions as well as public statements emphasize the role of this activity, in many cases even beyond its real economic relevance.

- **Environmental impacts** are also pointed out in terms of the incompatibility of windfarms with nature conservation, especially in zones having natural preserved areas (many of them included into the Natura 2000 Network).
- Other arguments are related to several attributes of **quality of life**, among the most cited: visual impacts, noise produced by both the construction of mills and their functioning, or limitations to public access to specific locations. In this regard, the arguments used clearly point at the rural nature of these quality of life attributes, when arguing that they are the rural landscape or the countryside tranquility which would be affected.
- Finally, submissions also directly focused on the very process of decision making. Namely, citizens and organizations argue that the mechanisms of **public participation** have been inadequate and insufficient. According to these submissions there has not been consultation to local actors (neither public nor private), so that there is a sort of feeling of marginalization of rural inhabitants. This argument is related to a certain feeling of injustice, i.e. it is not a mere technical argument, but a claim about the no consideration of rural inhabitants wills, and about the ‘subjugation’ of rural areas to demands stemming from the needs of urban areas.

However, as some interviewees explained, people gradually noticed that these core arguments were not relevant and appropriate for submissions, which are expected to contain technical and legal arguments, sometimes focused on minor details of the projects. In this regard, many of these ‘authentic’ submissions were related to the failure to comply with the norms about the location of windfarms (invasion of Natura 2000 areas, not observing the minimum distances to centers of population).

In order to elaborate the submissions for the specific project of each area, most of these associations contacted each other to find some guidance and support due to their lack of experience in legal procedures. This cooperation, jointly with the need to continue these legal procedures and access to the regional negotiation spheres, fuelled the up-scaling of the protest. Therefore in 2007 some of the anti-WEP local associations created the *Association for the Sustainable Wind Power Implementation* (ADES) that has a regional

scale. This association is basically focused on the administrative and legal tasks to stop or modify the WEP in the whole region of Valencia, for instance elaborating the submissions for the new projects arising.

4. Case studies

As explained before, the three case studies analysed here represent three different process of emergence of protest organisations. For all of them, a brief introduction to the study area is shown, which will allow to contextualize each case study. Then, the evolution of each association is depicted, from its origin –and the way it got the information about the projects- until its present stage. In this analysis, special attention will be paid to at what extent these organisations were supported by local and non-local networks.

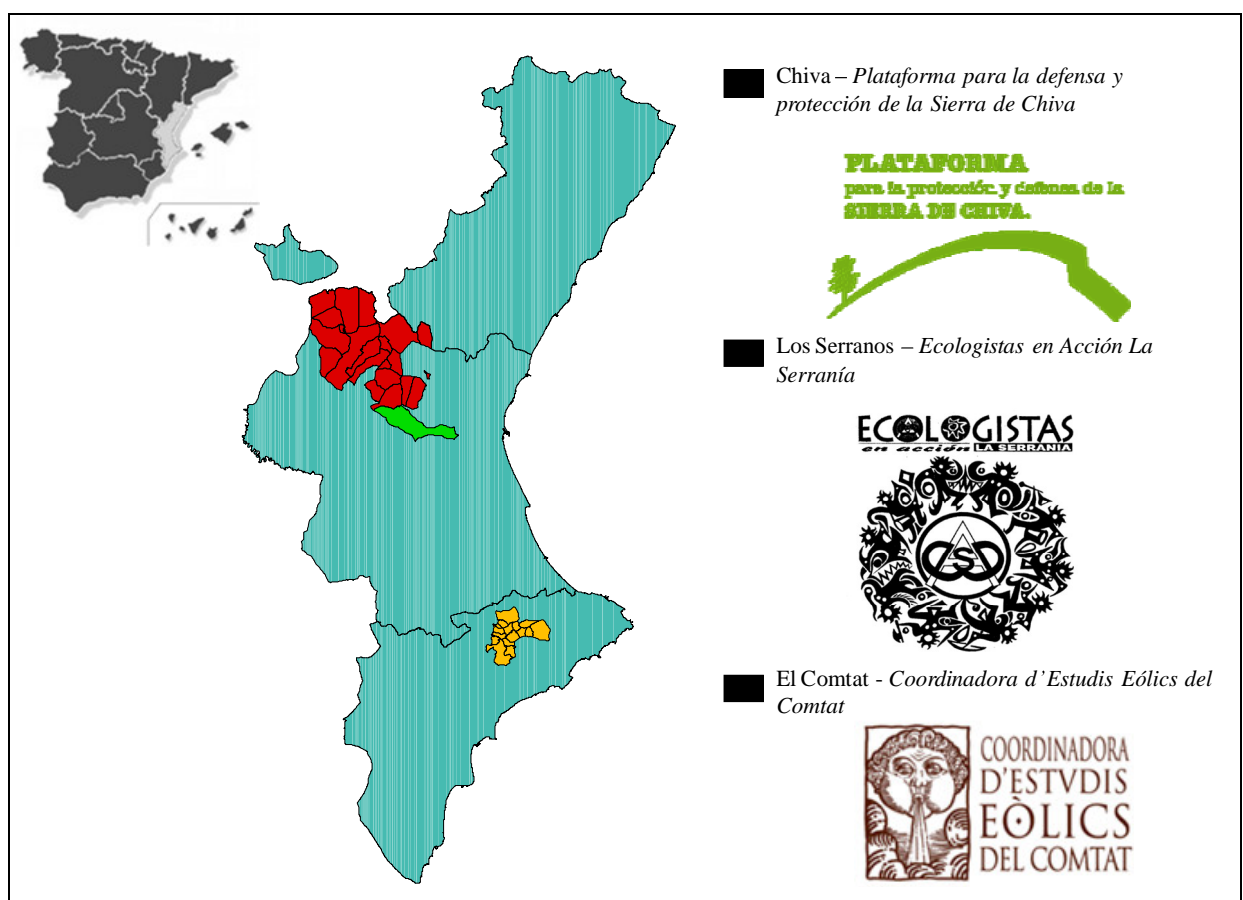


Figure 1. Location of the three case studies.

4.1 Plataforma para la Defensa y Protección de la Sierra de Chiva

Chiva is a municipality with 13,494 inhabitants, well connected through motorway with the metropolitan area of Valencia. In its surroundings there is a range of hills (Sierra de Chiva) that, despite having been quite diminished due to continuous fires in the last years, is highly appreciated by dwellers, who carry out there several activities (hunting, walking, etc.). It is precisely these hills which were included within the designated area 9 of the WEP.

The departing point of the movement against the projects can be found when the mayor of the village commented informally to members of 'Acrebo' (an ecologists association of Chiva) that he had received some maps and information from the regional government related to the construction of wind farms in the range of hills of the municipality. Although the ecologist regional federation Acrebo belongs to had not a clear position about the projects, members of Acrebo created a new association (*Plataforma para la Defensa y Protección de la Sierra de Chiva*, from now on the *Plataforma*) in order to gather all the associations of the municipality that could be against the construction of the wind farm. In this regard, the interviewees, besides the participation of a cultural association, a scouts group, and the own Acrebo, underline the presence of the local hunting society into the *Plataforma*.

Thanks of having the information about the project (by means of the mayor) before its public exposition, the *Plataforma* began a process of organisation of several activities (excursions to the hills, reforestations of the area, carrying out of ornithological studies, local painting and photography competitions, selling of t-shirts) as a way to generate a public attitude amongst the local people against the construction of wind farms in Chiva's hills.

Consequently, when the specific project affecting Chiva was published and the public submission period was opened they already had the public support of the majority of the village. The submission of 1,800 signature-petitions was accompanied by a public demonstration in the capital of the region. Furthermore, the *Plataforma* forced a plenary

session in the local council where the opposition parties voted against the windfarms and the ruling party abstained from voting.

In order to elaborate the submissions they relied on the work done by other anti-WEP associations of the region whose specific projects were published before. Although one or two persons of the *Plataforma* concentrate all the work, they also had the support of different experts to fulfil specific parts of the submissions such as biologists, ornithologists, topographers, etc. This specialised support was possible due to the non-local networks of the members of the *Plataforma*, i.e. these people mobilised their personal contacts to get non-paid professional support to elaborate technical and scientific submissions. Most of these personal contacts are related to the multiple affiliations of some of its members.

Besides the mobilisation of non-local relations for getting expertise, the strategy that the *Plataforma* of Chiva followed to fight against the WEP was based on mobilising local society, having always the local identity as a reference and a conciliatory attitude in order to gain the joining of local associations.

On the one hand, members of the *Plataforma* acknowledge the role played by the already existing local personal relationships. Members of Acrebo were clearly identified by the rest of citizens as dwellers of Chiva that had been engaged in activities related to the protection of the village's hills for a long time. In addition, they focused on the support of actors from Chiva, trying to avoid an image of external influences intervening in their activities. In this sense, members of the *Plataforma* acknowledge the relevance of not being identified by the rest of dwellers with a specific political affiliation, in order to avoid any criticism as politically influenced.

On the second hand, this strategy also led to look for alliances with local associations whom members of Acrebo had not previously had any collaboration. It is the case of the hunting association. The social relevance of the hunting association (in terms of the number of members and their closer political linkages with the ruling party) along with the fact that they were active 'users' of the hills, led Acrebo to try to gain its integration into the *Plataforma*. They succeed in exchange for leaving aside anything but the common interest of defending the hills from changes that could threaten their accessibility and the traditional uses carried out there.

Finally, the *Plataforma* has succeeded in its objective. After a long period without information, in June 2009 the windfarms in the hills of Chiva have disappeared from the list of provisional projects. The modifications introduced in the Environmental Impact Assessment have led the regional administration to reject the project in this area, being the only case, by the time being, of completely removed wind farm project within the development of the WEP.

At present, the *Plataforma* continues working with the same objective, to protect the range of hills of Chiva but from other threats. For example, the *Plataforma* is supporting the designation of the range of hills as a *municipal nature reserve* (a legal recognition for natural protection). In addition, the *Plataforma* promoted the creation of a Environmental Council, currently integrated in the Agriculture and Environmental Council of the municipality, a council where local organisations debate about these issues with the local government. The activity of the *Plataforma* in the topic of wind farms has become a secondary one, just supporting other anti-WEP associations of the region of Valencia.

4.2 Ecologist in Action – La Serranía

Los Serranos is a county made up of 19 municipalities ranging from 160 to 3,900 inhabitants. Total population amounts to 19,283 inhabitants. This area has undergone a process of demographic decline (lost of inhabitants due to migration and ageing of population), which conditions citizens' perceptions about the needs of economic development. In addition, the area has witnessed in the last decades several processes of dirty land development. Indeed, it is about an area of mineral extraction, with several open-cast mines that dominate landscape, and also affect other aspects as the intense traffic of large trucks, and even problems of dust pollution in certain centres of population. In addition, there have been several projects for the construction of dumping sites.

These precedents of dirty land developments, namely a project that finally was rejected for the construction of a dumping site for radioactive lighting conductors, generated a reaction among the dwellers of this area, whose contestation has been in part

materialised in different types of collective actors. Part of these platforms or organisations has had a short lifespan, specially the ones that were born to stop a concrete activity in a concrete municipality; but others remain working with the objective of protecting the landscape from other land transformations. This is the case of the associations that have led the anti-WEP movement in Los Serranos; they were active before the WEP was designed and they have led the mobilisations against the construction of windfarms. Though there are several associations –‘Centre of Studies La Serranía’, ‘Astronomy Centre of Aras’, ‘Landscape of Alpuente’ (an internet portal) and ‘Friends of Gestalgar’ (hiking association)- our focus will be on ‘Ecologistas en Acción – La Serranía’, (EeA-LS, from now on) which constitutes the most active organisation. EeA-LS is an organisation that belongs to a national federation (Ecologistas en Acción), though it maintains a high degree of autonomy regarding its strategy and actions to be undertaken.

Despite the fact that in Los Serranos there were some draft projects to construct wind farms even before the WEP was approved, EeA-LS only began its mobilisation against wind farm implementation in Los Serranos when the specific project of windmills was published. EeA-LS took sides in the issue once they had the information about the specific emplacement of the wind farms, contesting - after an internal discussion - not the production of wind energy but its concrete location.

The fact that this area has undergone several processes of dirty land development has had two main effects regarding the opposition against windfarms. On the one hand, EeA-LS maintained at the same time several fronts (windfarms, mineral extraction and dumping sites) in a large area (not concentrated in one municipality as the case of Chiva, but affecting in different manners to several municipalities). This situation has diffused and complicated the actions of EeA-LS regarding the wind farms. On the second hand, it is precisely this concentration of dirty developments also influenced the reaction of the local population, which graduated the perception about the damages that the different projects can entail, being the consequences of the wind farms perceived as less important than the ones deriving from waste sites or mines. This relativism resulted, according the interviewees, in more difficulties to mobilise the local population against the installation of windmills.

Submissions presented by EeA-LS relied on the support provided by the national federation Ecologistas en Accion it belongs to. In this sense, there is a difference with regards the previous case, where support for the elaboration of submissions was based on personal relationships, not so in organisational relationships. However, the regional administration rapidly rejected initial submissions, so EeA-LS changed its strategy, trying to contact people directly affected by projected windfarms (landowners, owners of houses near the mills) to continue legal actions. Lately, once ADES was created, EeA-LS significantly reduced its activity related to this protest, delegating to this regional association the continuation of legal processes.

The strategy of EeA-LS has been linked to a wider political discourse, i.e. citizens identify EeA-LS with a political stance. In addition, members of EeA-LS have carried out several direct actions that might have restrain population to participate more actively. The slogan “we ask them [politicians] for clean energies, but not to wash their dirty money” indicated a more ideologically marked position that in the previous case, which might have affected their results stressing the difficulties to collaborate especially with the local governments.

Finally, some windfarms were built in Los Serranos, and others continue projected. The protest continues active but more focused on legal procedures than on mobilising the local population.

4.3 Coordinadora d'Estudis Eolics del Comtat

As the previous case, the Comtat is a county made up of 19 municipalities that were included within the zone 14 of the WEP. It is a low populated area, with only 4,214 inhabitants, were municipalities' population ranges between 48 and 840 inhabitants. It is a mountain area that has undergone in the last decades the arrival of newcomers from Northern European countries (known by the local population as “the English” because there is a majority coming from the UK). In addition, there has been a slight development of tourism thanks to the support of the LEADER programme. Furthermore, because of the attractiveness of the area, there is a relevant weight of second homes, belonging in many cases to people living and working in near urban areas.

The *Coordinadora d'Estudis Eòlics del Comtat* (the *Coordinadora* from now on) is the outcome of a process that began when the mayor of one of the municipalities informed an ecologist and cultural association of the area about a confuse information she had received from the regional Administration asking for permissions for the beginning of certain public works for the construction of electric installations. This information rapidly spread in the county. Interviewees acknowledge in this regard the role the “English’s” network. These foreigners, who were highly concerned about possible modifications of the landscape and environment, maintain among them strong relationships, which facilitated the diffusion of information in the several affected municipalities. As a result of the public concern, two assemblies of dwellers took place. From them, a group of the most concerned people decided to create the coordinating.

Since the public exposition of the project affecting el Comtat was published a month after the first information arrived, one of the first actions of the *Coordinadora* was to elaborate the submissions. The members of the *Coordinadora* elaborated them in a rather autonomous way given their inexperience, not having previous specific contacts in other organizations or personal relationships to turn to. The campaign to gather this support was carried out mainly at the local level, where the *Coordinadora* used a discourse based on the preservation of the rural traits of the area. Finally they presented 40,000 signed submissions (10 different submissions signed by around 1,000 individuals) to the project of the zone 14.

Interviewees from the *Coordinadora* stress the following aspects of their strategy:

- Perseverance. This is one of the main assets the *Coordinadora* has got. Its members have been meeting almost every week from 2004, analysing the state of the situation and designing future actions. These continuous interactions have led to the creation of strong personal ties among them, which reinforces their capacity to go on. In addition, interviewees express a high degree of auto-satisfaction for the outcomes obtained until now. Besides these weekly small meetings, the *Coordinadora* organises a formal assembly once a year for all the people interested in the situation of the projects.

- Interviewees point out that the main success of the *Coordinadora* was the presentation of the 40,000 submissions. This achievement constituted a point of inflection for the *Coordinadora* which gained a social legitimacy that facilitated the access to the media (see below), as well as the recognition as valid representatives of dwellers' wills regarding the windfarms. In addition, the *Coordinadora* became a reference for many associations having similar objectives, which resorted to them for asking advice and support. In addition, this achievement also facilitated the access to other institutional instances: the Valencian Ombudsman, which declared this area as non suitable for the construction of windmills and recommended to look for another location; or to participate in the petitions committee of the European Union.
- The *Coordinadora* also tried from the very beginning to play in the arena of media. It elaborates and sends press releases very frequently². Although they had initial problems to have the releases published on the newspaper, they finally reached recognition by some media which facilitated later publications.
- The process of learning about how to intervene effectively in the administrative decision-making process. Rather than relying on the experience of other associations, the *Coordinadora* has been opting to a more autonomous way. In spite of not having experts into the *Coordinadora*, some of its members have specialised. Actually, who has become the main legal specialist of the *Coordinadora* is a potter.

At present, the *Coordinadora* is still waiting for a final decision of the Administration about the submission presented and the projects. In spite of not having yet an official resolution, there are some 'signals' indicating that the projects would not be carried out. Meanwhile they continue their activity being a referent for other mobilisations around unwanted land uses.

² Actually, after the interview with them, we were asked to send them this paper in order to elaborate a press release about that issue.

5. Discussion

The regional government employs the planning system to deliver specific activities in the territory in order to pursue concrete goals, in this case the increase of the production of wind energy within the region of Valencia. Through the regulation, in this study materialised by the WEP, the regional government determines what type of uses can be developed in a concrete area establishing a direct zoning of the whole region. The specification of the places that are going to be affected, jointly with the public participation mechanisms established by the planning system, are the ones that fuel the emergence of collective actors. However, as the case studies have illustrated, there is a certain degree of informality and low predictability over the administrative process; as shown by the ways the local population has been informed about the initial project, or the uncertainty about the periods the administration is using for delivering its decisions.

This ‘informality’ -regarding the incoherencies in the development of the administrative process, the absence of an action protocol or guidelines that establish the administrative and legal phases for the construction of windmills, and the lack of carefulness in the process (i.e. the public exposition period of one of the projects was ten days shorter than the law establishes)- has been a key issue in the legal actions carried out by the organisations against the WEP. Besides the legal procedures, there has been a fierce critique about the insignificant role played by civil society in the planning system - understood as a governance mechanism affecting directly rural areas- and about the secondary role that rural areas play in the whole region. Therefore, the development of the WEP has constituted a ‘regulation arena’ where different actors have participated representing their interests. Namely, amongst other consequences, the WEP has triggered the representation of a discourse in some rural areas of Valencia that demands a higher participation of local population in the decision-making processes. Meanwhile these new social movement organisations feel responsible to guard their respective rural areas, therefore they become another actor in the governance of rural areas; for instance participating through the planning system (i.e. submissions), mobilising local opinion, integrated in formal government structures (i.e. the Agricultural and Environmental Local Council of Chiva) or having informal direct contact with local governments for the continuous exchange of information (i.e. *La Coordinadora* meets continually the mayors of the small municipalities of el Comtat)

In the three case studies analysed in this research there are differences among the discourses inspiring the action of the specific associations. The discourse of the *Plataforma* of Chiva is based on the defence of a local landscape, therefore supporting an environmentalist discourse but materialised only at the local level. The EeA-LS also highlighted environmental aspects in their position but merged with rural traits in a broader geographical context. In this organisation it is especially relevant the linkage to ideological stances that are present in their actions, imbued in their slogans and terminology, for instance they refer to its organisation as made up of “militants”. Finally, *La Coordinadora* is more concerned about the preservation of the rural traits of el Comtat, enhancing a specific rural way of life. They highlight the value of the traditions and the quality of life enjoyed in those villages but also the functions that rural areas and rural dwellers play in the society as a whole.

The different discourses have conditioned their strategies to pursue their common goal, to stop the local implementation of WEP, having different outcomes in each case. Although it is neither possible to attribute the success or the failure of the opposition to windfarm projects to a single factor, nor to isolate the relative contribution of each of the factors that have played in the process; we can extract, from the case studies, some elements that help to understand the differences and similarities among several cases that are a part of a common process.

Non-local networks are important for having access to privileged information and expertise to be able to participate in the legal process, which requires familiarity with the specific rules regulating the procedures, or even the appropriated vocabulary. Despite this role of the non-local contacts, in the cases that have been studied, there is not a special interest in networking at the regional level if these linkages have not been established earlier. The fact is that these non-local networks are based on pre-existing social networks that are usually product of multiple affiliations. These linkages are mobilized mainly in the initial phase of the protest, later their value is undermined in front of the local network. This prevalence of networking at the local level results in a low up-scaling of the process.

In fact, the interviewees coincide that are local networks which constitute the main asset (or the main weakness) for the opposition to projects. The familiarity (proximity) of the

relationships between the participants of the associations and the rest of the population is crucial to try to engage local dwellers with the organization's discourse. Members of the *Plataforma* of Chiva call this process '*evangelization*', and it occurs at the local bar, at the street, etc. Therefore the scale of the organization is important to interact frequently with the local population. This scale might be seen related to the lack of resources and thus determining the local scale as the only level where this type of organization can have certain mobilization power. However, the focus on generating a local position against the projects is more related with the stances they defend about who takes decision and how.

The different organizations try by all means to formalize this local support, for example highlighting the number of submissions presented or forcing a plenary session in the local council about the topic. When they manage to achieve the formalization of the local support, they feel legitimized in front of the local and the regional government, as well as other institutions (i.e. Valencian Ombudsman, the public prosecutor, other organizations or social movements). If this local support is recognized by the local government, probably the specific project affecting the municipality will be stopped since the municipality has to give permission to carry on the public works. However, there are mechanisms, such as those inside political parties that can influence this final decision. These uncertainties lead social movement's organizations to continue active, even after having some evidence of the cancellation of the project, in part because there is a lack of confidence in the institutions and the democratic system in general (Cruz Gallach, 2008)

6. Conclusions

The mobilisation against the installation of windfarms in the region of Valencia can be characterized as a new social movement drawing upon Della Porta and Diani (1999) definition. Nevertheless, it is necessary to qualify some elements.

- The prevalence of collective goals in front of individual ones: In the three case studies there is a clear position inspired by the collective goals related to environment, rurality and governance. However, it is significant in some cases

that the achievement of these objectives is only focused on their specific local area, investing little energy on up-scaling the process. This materialisation of pursuing collective goals in a very specific area raises issues about the 'scale' of the collective goals and the differences between individual and collective concerns.

- The non-ideological participation. As has already been mentioned, in EeA-LS the ideological stances are imbued in their discourse. That it is not to say that they have direct relations with political parties, on the contrary the three of them try to minimize the possible affiliations with political parties but this decision might be more influenced by their strategy to gain local support than by a lack of ideology in their positions.

In the study of rural social movements it is interesting to address whether the case studied is part of a rural social movement or not. In this regard there are two important elements. On the one hand the focus on the locality, linked to the importance of gaining local support and recognition, reinforces the difficulties to coordinate or the fragmentations inside the social movement. On the other hand, there are different identities inside the social movement that respond to different discourses of ruralism (Woods, 2003b). However, these different concepts of rurality build alliances between them within the movement, for example the ecologists and the hunters in Chiva, or the Northern European residents and the farmers in El Comtat. Although their discourses are different there is cooperation among them through the mobilisation process. Surprisingly the tensions arise inside the same discourse (i.e. environmentalists), especially the interviewers highlight the divide between rural and urban dwellers in the understanding of the conflict (or its implications...) despite sharing the broader discourse.

These considerations about a rural social movement are limited due to the focus of this research in a specific protest movement against windfarms. Nevertheless, we have shown how in some cases associations initially engaged in a concrete protest enter into the local governance mechanisms, constituting a new scenario in the governance of rural areas, modifying the 'politics of the rural' previously established. Furthermore, in the three cases they have tackled -from the beginning or along the process- different

topics affecting rural areas, constituting new actors to be considered in future land development processes:

“Anyway, there have been problems before and never there has been any asociacion; suddenly there has been a very big problem and an association has been created but that problem has been the last straw. Because from now on ... I’m sure that they won’t dare to do the things they used to...” (Member of one of the anti-WEP organizations)

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