

Governance | Individual communication

IC - (2019) - DECARBONIZATION WITHOUT CITIZENS. THE DISCURSIVE REPRODUCTION OF EXCLUSION AND DISEMPOWERMENT IN COAL REGIONS FACING TRANSITION

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Background and objectives

Political anthropology and environmental psychology insist that, in order to be effective, international decarbonisation policies need to be translated into locally meaningful discourses and practices. Moreover, a dialogical stance is needed in order not to replicate cultural and structural forms of violence, rhetoric of exclusion and disempowerment.

Process and methods (for empirical research)

The current study (carried out within the Tipping+ H2020 project) examines these mechanisms in a former Italian coal region. Sulcis, located in Southern Sardinia, is an exemplar case of 'extractivist' models: the region saw the expansion of coal mines and industries across the 19th and 20th century, and since their closure from the 1970s it is facing industrial and social crises. Currently Sulcis is facing the final phase out of coal, and further deindustrialization processes.

In this context we aimed to examine the psychological and cultural factors that could favour a radical shift towards new systems, based on renewables and on sustainable energy communities. The study followed a mixed method approach including lexicometric analysis of the press, interviews with stakeholders and local inhabitants, ethnographic observation.

Main results (or main arguments in the case of critical reviews)

Results show that societal and institutional discourses about transition largely reproduce disempowerment rhetoric: citizens are represented as passive and dependent on decisions or technologies coming from "the outside". Local communities are lacking voice and are positioned as conflictual actors at most. These rhetoric seems to be so hegemonic that even the most proactive subjects in the area show a lack of collective ownership and agency.

Implications for research and practice/policy | Importance and originality of the contribution

Energy transition is, at most, represented as an economic opportunity for individuals or families, whereas environmental, political or collective changes are absent from the discourse. Results are discussed reflecting on the importance of accompanying transitional political projects with social and cultural change.

Palavras-chave : Decarbonization, Tipping point, Extractivism, Discourse, Social representations