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Analysis

Shared value vs plural values. Contesting renewable energy projects of the Enel Group

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ABSTRACT

The energy transition triggers urgent questions about what values are important, who controls transitional processes, and who has the power to define the answers to the climate crisis. Energy companies claim their central role in the development of renewable energy as the ultimate solution. However, communities affected by large-scale renewable energy projects have extensively raised environmental and social justice concerns and denounced the industry's poor practices and abuses.

In this article, we analyse 15 socio-environmental conflicts around renewable energy projects owned by the Enel Group, one of the world's largest energy utilities, through the values and valuation languages of the affected communities. We map them onto five dimensions: environmental, health-related, socio-economic, ontological, and political. We build on environmental justice and ecological economics literature on valuation languages and employ counter-accounting to gather bottom-up evidence of grievances.

We argue that, while the company claims that RE is the ultimate solution and the 'Creating Shared Value' approach is beneficial to all parties, those impacted by Enel's projects question the corporate model of energy transition and defend a plurality of values embedded in relational worldviews that are systematically misrecognised. We eventually criticise the corporate self-attributed moral and value-centred mandate in the energy transition and call for inclusive research about desirable energy futures rooted in plural and relational value systems.

1. Introduction

In 2016, Francesco Starace, the then-CEO and general director of the energy company Enel, addressed the Luiss Business School academic community in Rome and explained his theory and strategy to bring change into his organisation. The executive argued that a small group of 'changers' should be placed in the centres of power to create malaise and fear so that the whole machine would embrace the change, and eventually destroy the old system. His reasoning was, at the end of the day, "nobody wants to suffer".[1]

Starace referred to change within an organisation. However, how change is brought about and how strategic investments are promoted have profound consequences for the people and ecosystems affected by projects. Although "nobody wants to suffer", some actually do, but their

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[1] Michele Azzu, "Amministratore Delegato di Enel, discorso choc:, "Bisogna ispirare paura nei dipendenti", *Fanpage*, 18 May 2016 (https://www.fanpage.it/economia/amministratore-delegato-di-enel-discorso-schock-bisogna-ispirare-paura-nei-dipendenti/).

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voices are often ignored and sometimes forcefully silenced.

In this article, we investigate controversies around renewable energy (hereafter, RE) projects of the Enel Group, one of the largest RE utilities globally. Our intention is to understand which value systems and worldviews are threatened or downplayed, and how this occurs in the name of the energy transition within the context of corporate social responsibility (hereafter, CSR). We do so through the analysis of the languages of valuation deployed by affected communities, environmental justice organisations, researchers, and journalists (Martinez-Alier, 2008; Martínez-Alier et al., 2010; Avcı et al., 2010).

We acknowledge that tensions around RE plants are not limited to the Enel Group, and the literature questioning RE as the solution to the climate breakdown expands rapidly. The number of RE-related conflicts, in fact, has been surging globally, and RE projects are potentially as contentious as fossil fuel projects (Temper et al., 2020; Levenda et al., 2021; Sovacool et al., 2021). This is primarily due to the extractivist industrial context in which they are embedded, but it is also shaped by forced displacement, land acquisition and land-use change, among other factors (see Vallejos-Romero et al., 2020, on wind farms; Del Bene et al., 2018; Siciliano et al., 2019; Villamayor-Tomas et al., 2026, on hydroelectric dams; Kunze and Hertel, 2017, on geothermal energy; Cantoni et al., 2022, and Shokrgozar and Sareen, 2025, on solar energy; Scheidel et al., 2023 on Indigenous territories).

Despite the expanding literature on RE conflicts and valuation languages, these strands remain only partially connected. Studies of distributive justice tend to focus on social acceptance, preferences, willingness to pay, or procedural design, often abstracted from power asymmetries and corporate strategies (Faulques et al., 2022; Lehmann et al., 2024). Conversely, political ecology and environmental justice scholarships have documented resistance and dispossession, with a growing attention at how these conflicts systematically confront corporate sustainability frameworks across multiple territories (Maher et al., 2021, Bontempi et al., 2021, and Pasquina-Llavero, 2025). Yet, there is limited cross-country evidence on how locally impacted communities express value systems that confront the corporate CSR discourses on the energy trasition, and how corporations adjust and evolve their narratives to push their agenda forward.

To fill this gap, we mobilise the four main tenets of environmental justice (distribution, participation, recognition, and capabilities), as well as ecological economics lenses on valuation languages. We adopt a counter-reporting methodology to track bottom-up evidence of disputed values and worldviews. We address the following questions: 1. How do the communities affected by Enel's RE projects express different values and respond to the corporate narrative of a supposedly "shared value" around RE projects? 2. How do these different values relate to the main tenets of environmental justice, namely distribution, participation, recognition, and capabilities?

We chose to study projects operated by the Enel Group for (i) its international leadership in the RE sector, with plants operating in countries with contentious colonial legacies[2]; (ii) its performance in CSR initiatives and its claims about the application of top sustainability standards; (iii) the adoption of the 'Creating Shared Value' (hereafter, CSV) framework to reconcile the pursuit of corporate gains with improving the social and economic conditions in the impacted communities (Porter and Kramer, 2006), despite the presence of local protests and international solidarity campaigns; and (iv) for a principle of public accountability, as 23.6% of the company is owned by the Ministry of Economy and Finance of Italy, making Italian taxpayers the largest shareholder of the company.

[2] Although having developed a fossil fuels phase-out plan, Enel continues to invest in fossil fuel infrastructure. More details: https://powerutilitiestracker.org/#tab-3fcb5c715aff10662bf

2. Theoretical framework. Socio-environmental justice, energy justice, and languages of valuation

Environmental justice studies have highlighted the uneven distribution of benefits and negative impacts of industrial activities (costs, externalities, etc.), referred to as the distributional tenet of environmental justice; the lack of meaningful participation and denied access to decision-making (participation or procedural tenet); the misrecognition of, and disrespect for the knowledge, values, beliefs, and worldviews of impacted or marginalised actors (recognition or epistemic justice) (Schlosberg, 2007); and the non-fulfilment of conditions to pursue a dignified life (the capability and social justice tenet) (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993). These aspects cannot be understood separately (Wood, 2023). Theoretically, multiple approaches and ways of knowing have contributed to this framework, particularly thanks to decolonial (Whyte, 2018a; Temper, 2018; Álvarez and Coolsaet, 2020; Rodriguez, 2020; Roy and Hanaček, 2023), or Indigenous (Ulloa, 2017; McGregor et al., 2020) studies. The field has acknowledged that justice is not a monolithic concept, but has a strong subjective and collective component. It is a condition to be constructed, defended, and disputed, and can only be achieved when people can live lives that they consider meaningful (Sen, 1993). Similarly, every social conflict around environmental issues unfolds over multiple ways of perceiving the world, understanding values, defining priorities, and defending worldviews (Martínez-Alier et al., 2010).

Similar reflections also occurred in energy justice scholarship, leading to the expansion of its original, Global North-focussed perspective through non-Western, non-anthropocentric, and generally more inclusive approaches (Sovacool et al., 2023; Dunlap and Tornel, 2023; Tornel, 2023). A decolonial approach to energy justice, for example, calls for a reconceptualisation of energy from Indigenous cosmovisions and value systems where the care for the territory and reciprocity with all species is at the core of human activity (Post et al., 2025). Scholars of Indigenous and decolonial environmental justice and traditional ecological knowledge have further investigated the relational nature of co-existence, value systems, and the web of reciprocal responsibility among humans, and with the other-than-human world (Kimmerer, 2012; Whyte, 2018b; McGregor et al., 2020).

The environmental and energy justice literature has analysed the ways in which values around environmental conflicts are expressed through languages of valuation (Avcı et al., 2010; Cardoso, 2018; Martínez-Alier et al., 2010; O'Connor, 1993). In this work, we refer to values in incommensurable, relational, and reflexive terms, as an expression of ethical, spiritual, ecological, and material concerns, as well as ways of relating with other human and non-human beings and the territory (Himes and Muraca, 2018). We distinguish between values and valuation languages, defined as the plural ways in which these values are articulated, justified, and made legible in situations of conflict (Martínez-Alier et al., 2010).

In turn, value pluralism is based on the recognition of different and often conflicting value domains, which are not reducible to each other, nor to some ultimate value (Arias-Arévalo et al., 2018; O'Neill et al., 2008). The valuation languages that express such pluralism are intrinsically diverse, due to the variety of actors involved, their interests, political and power relations, and knowledge reference systems (Duarte-Abadía and Boelens, 2016). They are embedded in different epistemologies and worldviews (Escobar, 2020), and sometimes differ and clash (Martínez-Alier et al., 1998).

In fact, where companies design compensatory and mitigating measures for the affected populations, they often reduce the complexity of a given situation, context, or system of relationships, disregarding value systems that are incommensurable and that do not fit into a cost-benefit framework or other market-based practices. The incommensurability of values and their relational nature are, along with poor political will, at the core of failed attempts to compensate affected people for the loss of their territories (Martínez-Alier et al., 1998).

This perspective also complements empirical research on the social acceptance of RE. Studies show that support for renewables is strongly shaped by territorial distributive justice, generational effects, and perceptions of fairness rather than by technology alone (Faulques et al., 2022). Recent work further highlights how territorial and institutional characteristics condition acceptability (Delcayre and Bourdin, 2025) and how planning regimes can either open or foreclose space for justice claims (Azkarraga and Gurrutxaga, 2024).

In these contexts, conflicts become the site where a new vocabulary of resistance and justice is shaped, narratives and discourses around values are disputed, and potentially transformative visions and initiatives emerge (Martinez-Alier et al., 2016; Temper et al., 2020).

3. Context background: Enel and sustainability policies

Enel is a leading company in the global expansion of RE plants. In 2007, together with the Spanish firm Acciona, the Group acquired Spanish utility Endesa, and inherited a large portfolio of projects in Latin America (Bergami et al., 2013). In 2008, Enel founded Enel Green Power (EGP) and further expanded RE operations globally.

In 2015, Enel adopted the Creating Shared Value model to address the urgency of climate change, in contrast with the 'old paradigm'–i.e., a narrow focus on solely business success (Enel, 2015, 2022a). The 'new' paradigm allegedly aims to address issues such as fuel poverty and energy accessibility, as well as creating job opportunities and developing health care, education, and infrastructure for local communities, "starting from a proactive analysis of their needs through a shared value creation models" (Enel, 2021a, p.15). In the company's words, the model should transform a shareholder capitalism to a stakeholder capitalism, and benefit everyone (Enel, 2022a).

The company's sustainability reports highlight positive impacts on the communities as examples of accomplished creation of a 'shared value'. For example, for the Ralco Hydroelectric Plant in Chile, Enel praises a community project involving the collection, processing and sales of hazelnuts, potato cultivation and tourism, as well as scholarships to cover school fees, and a general improvement in water management systems. For El Quimbo Hydroelectric Plant in Colombia, the company stresses how families were allowed to choose between collective resettlement, individual resettlement, and selling their land, as well as emphasising that Enel set up communication channels to handle complaints by affected families. For the Boujdour Wind Power Plant in Western Sahara, the company claims the positive impacts on employment for the local population, as well as the quality of the consultation process that took place with the Sahrawi Indigenous community, giving Enel a 'social licence' to operate (Enel, 2021a).

4. Methodology

4.1. Data collection

We mobilise counter-accounting to examine power, omission, and misrecognition in renewable energy governance (Gallhofer et al., 2006). Recent accounting literature has consolidated this methodology for its political potential to analyse the dynamics behind megaprojects (e.g., Archel et al., 2011; Tregidga, 2017), as well as for its relevance in systematising information carried out by researchers, campaigners or activists to challenge corporate discourses and identify alternative proposals or transformative practices (Laine and Vinnari, 2017).

We started from the sample of Enel-owned projects included as of 2022 in the Global Atlas of Environmental Justice (ejatlas.org) database, the largest mapping endeavour on global environmental conflicts. We then reviewed the Enel Group project portfolio[3] to have a complete list of overseas Enel-owned or -operated projects. We conducted an online search on the main web engines, associating the name of each project with key concepts as follows:

[Project Name] AND (conflict OR violence OR dispute OR impact OR contentious OR protest OR resistance OR opposition OR affected OR dispossession OR eviction OR social movements).

We run our search in English, Spanish and Portuguese, as the official languages of most countries where the projects were planned and/or implemented. Cases were included when all the following conditions applied: (i) Enel owned or operated the project, (ii) credible evidence of socio-environmental conflict or contestation was available, and (iii) a satisfactory amount of documentation existed to identify community claims. Sources published up to December 2023 were considered. Several projects were excluded despite reported impacts due to insufficient or unverifiable information. The focus on extra-European cases reflects an analytical choice to examine RE expansion as the internationalisation policy of the company (Enel, 2022a), in contexts marked by colonial power relations and its ongoing violent legacy, as well as Indigenous territorial and decolonial claims.

We examined the evidence available in the form of reports, newspaper articles, social media posts, and academic literature for each project that had received criticism. We then remotely interviewed key informants, including local leaders, affected families, academics, and members of environmental justice organisations, who were selected through snowball sampling. Permission to disclose their names was granted; however, we decided to only use their initials and their professional and/or political profiles as identifiers. All interviews were carried out by the authors in a language each interviewee could understand. The use of specific nouns in the local language was encouraged to best capture the intimate meaning of our testimonies.

The final sample of cases includes 15 cases (five wind, eight hydropower, one solar and one geothermal plant) located in 7 countries, namely USA, Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Chile, Brazil, and India, and in one non-self-governing territory, Western Sahara (Fig. 1). A total of over 120 documents were coded and 13 complementary semi-structured interviews covering ten cases were conducted. The complete list of these sources is provided in the Appendix 1. A summary of each case is included in Annex 1. An overview of all projects is provided in Table 1.

4.2. Data analysis

We grounded data analysis in a combination of Inductive Content Analysis and Consensual Qualitative Research (Kyngäs, 2019; Hill and Knox, 2021). All authors contributed in the review of data to identify open codes, which were then combined, or further split, through iterative rounds of discussion and adjudication. Rather than calculating formal inter-coder reliability scores, disagreements were resolved through collective interpretation until consensus was achieved. Codes reflect as much as possible how values are expressed in the raw data in order to avoid misinterpretation and dilution of meaning.

Table 2 shows the list of codes, grouped into five macro-categories: 1. environmental; 2. socio-economic; 3. health-related; 4. ontological; and 5. political. The first three dimensions refer to the impacts of projects or concerns across the different phases of their implementation (proposal, construction, operation, etc.). The ontological dimension refers to modes of existence of affected communities, their viewing, shaping and 'enacting' the world (Escobar, 2020; Blaser, 2013), while the political dimension includes discourses that point to uneven power relations (e.g., colonial legacies, repression, corruption, misrecognition, etc.) (Paulson et al., 2003).

While these dimensions are analytically distinct, some claims overlapped across categories and were coded based on their primary meaning and purpose. For example, references to the sacrality of rivers or territories were coded as ontological when they emphasised relational, spiritual, or identity-based connections, and as political when

[3] https://www.enelgreenpower.com/our-projects. Last accessed May 25th 2025

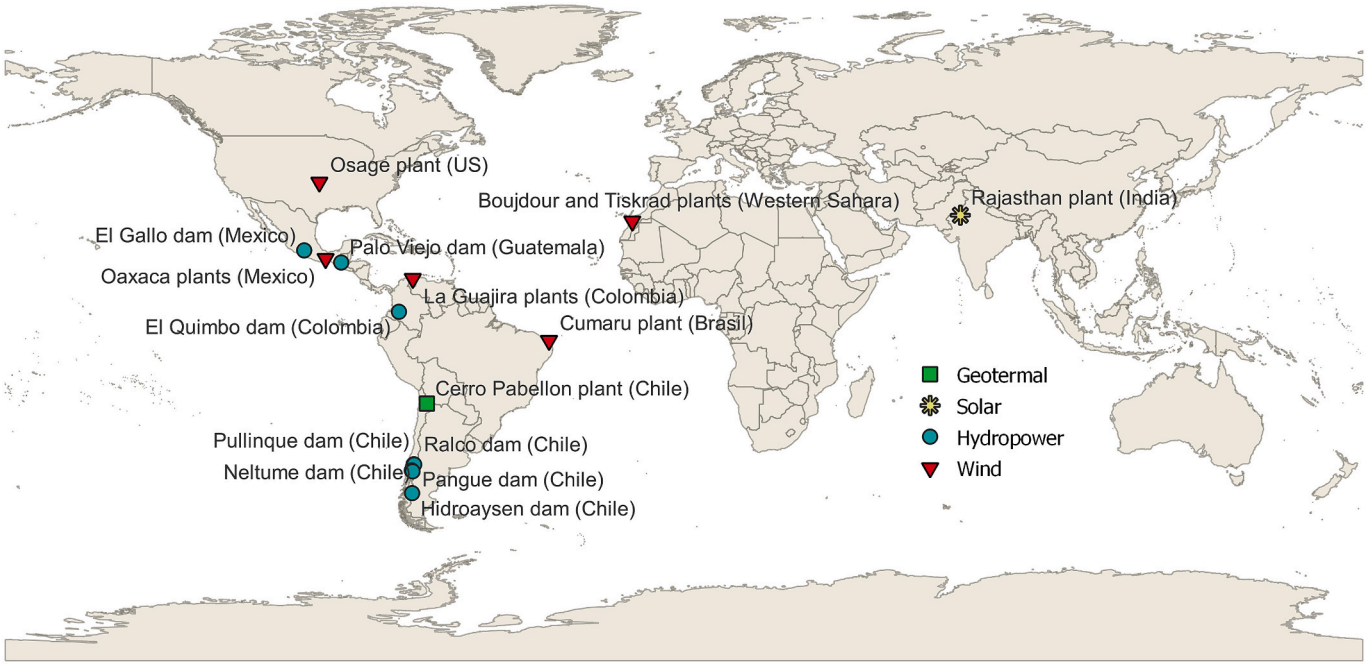


Fig. 1. Cases map. Geographical location and type of plant of the analysed cases. Own map.

Table 1
List of projects, their status and capacity. Data retrieved from either Enel official website or Global Energy Monitor Database (https://globalenergymonitor.org/).

	Project	Country	Status (as of January 2026)	Capacity (installed or planned)
1	Boujdour and Tiskrad Wind Power Plants	Western Sahara	Operating and Planned*	300 MW*
2	Cerro Pabellón Geothermal Plant	Chile	Operating	81 MW
3	Cumaru Wind Project	Brazil	Operating	206 MW
4	El Gallo Dam	Mexico	Operating	30 MW
5	El Quimbo Dam	Colombia	Operating	400 MW
6	Guajira Wind Plants	Colombia	Planned and Cancelled**	184.5 MW**
7	Hidroaysén Dams	Chile	Cancelled	2750 MW
8	Neltume Dam	Chile	Cancelled	490 MW
9	Oaxaca Wind Plants	Mexico	Operating	144 MW
10	Osage Wind Power Plant	US	Operating	150 MW
11	Palo Viejo Dam	Guatemala	Operating	85 MW
12	Pangue Dam	Chile	Operating	466 MW
13	Pullinque Dam	Chile	Operating	51 MW
14	Ralco Dam	Chile	Operating	689 MW
15	Rajasthan Solar Power Plant	India	Planned	300 MW

* Boujdour and Tiskrad are two units of the broader 850 MW Integrated Wind Energy Programme, which includes five wind farms in total. Both units are planned for construction in Western Sahara. While Boujdour is already operating at the time of writing, no information has been disclosed about Tiskrad. See more details at: https://wsrw.org/en/news/enel-dodges-question-on-project-in-occupied-territory

** The Windpeshi plant in La Guajira was eventually purchased by the Colombian company Ecopetrol in July 2025. The data for this article refer to the planning stage under Enel's ownership. See more details at: https://www.larepublica.co/economia/ecopetrol-le-compro-a-enel-colombia-proyecto-eolico-windpeshi-por-us-50-millones-4174648

mobilised to contest sovereignty, decision-making authority, or legal recognition. Similarly, environmental degradation was coded as health-related when sources explicitly linked ecological change to physical or psychological harm to people, and as environmental when impacts concerned ecosystems or non-human species without a direct human health framing.

5. Results

Our findings resonate with long-standing critiques of extractivist and growth-oriented infrastructure development, including mining, fossil fuel extraction, and large-scale water or transport projects (Pasquina-Llavero et al., 2024). In many respects, the conflicts surrounding RE installations reproduce patterns of dispossession, territorial restructuring, and valuation clashes. What appears specific to RE is not the nature of the impacts but the additional moral authority derived from climate mitigation narratives, which can obscure or delegitimise local claims. This aligns with scholarship on green extractivism and colonialism, which argues that renewable energy expansion often extends, rather than replaces, extractivist logics (Dunlap, 2017; Hamouchene, 2022).

Appendix 2 summarises key descriptive details of each case study and lists all sub-codes linked to that case, including illustrative quotes that capture the main valuation languages and impacts from the case studies. Since all dimensions are interrelated, each case maps onto multiple sub-codes. In the sections below, we present the findings of our analysis for each dimension.

5.1. Environmental dimension

The environmental dimension includes impacts on non-human living organisms, ecosystems, and their functions. Enel claims that the company addresses the environmental dimension beyond the reduced GHG emissions of clean energy installations, and includes biodiversity protection and pollution control (Enel, 2022). However, all examined cases show important environmental concerns, with impacts on flora and fauna being the most frequent (Fig. 2).

In the case of the Osage Wind Project in the USA, for example, the turbines threaten the ecological functions of the Tallgrass Prairies, which are considered key ecosystems that function as carbon-storage

Table 2
Dimensions and associated sub-codes.

Category	Codes
Environmental dimension Consequences on the environment, non-human living organisms, ecosystems, and their functions due to the contentious project	Impacts on flora & fauna Poor (or no) preliminary assessment Land destabilisation Impacts on land & landscape Impacts on resilience resources Impacts on thermo-regulation functions Impacts on water Impacts on protected areas
Socio-economic dimension Consequences on local and regional economies, households, and social relations of human groups among themselves and with their territory due to the contentious project	Property damage & value loss Traditional economy-lifestyle disruption Forced displacement Inadequate compensation Specific impacts on Indigenous peoples Unfair cost-benefit sharing Violation of law Decrease in security Loss of livelihood Turn to market economy Inadequate mitigation Out-migration Change in land use Impacts on job policies
Health-related dimension Consequences on the physical and mental health of human groups, on their care system and health-related knowledge due to the contentious project	Impacts on psychological well-being Impacts on human health Impacts on environmental health Loss of medicines
Ontological dimension Expressions referring to consequences on the relationships of inter-existence and identity of social groups with specific features of their territory and ecosystems, with non-human inhabitants and with their own spiritual systems and cosmologies.	Sacred/spiritual site encroachment Rights to life affected Connection with ancestors affected Loss of territory Loss of emotional connection with territory Impacts on specific species Impacts on rivers & natural elements Impacts on territory-land-country
Political dimension Expressions referring to practices and processes through which power relations manifest, often unevenly, among social groups holding interests around or being affected by the contentious project.	(Neo)Colonialism Complaints about corporate strategies Elites gaining more power Critiques to energy management & models Lack of proper consultation Misrecognition Criminalisation Militarisation Violence on women Violent repression Environmental defenders assassination Poor information Unequal power relations Non-state sovereignty violation Unfulfilled agreements Claims of corruption-cooptation Death threats Community fragmentation

sinks and mitigate climate change (Euliss Jr et al., 2006). The tall wind towers and wind turbines are also a threat to birds, especially endangered species that are sacred to the Osage Nation, such as the bald and golden eagles and the greater prairie chicken (Bryce, 2023; Willmott et al., 2012). In India, the land where the Rajasthan Solar Power Project would be built, while non-cultivable, is home to desert animals and nutritious vegetation that grows during the rainy season, as well as dry fruits that serve as precious food during droughts. Flattening the sand dunes to place panels may jeopardise the harvest of this food source and affect the few patches of cultivated land, by blowing sand towards irrigated areas (RJ_Interview 2).

Environmental impacts affect the ecological functions of ecosystems as well as their socio-economic, cultural and spiritual roles. In the case of the Pullinque Dam in Chile, communities expressed special concern for the disappearance of the Thuf Thuf, a waterfall that breaks on the rocks and generates humidity and steam that, in turn, creates a specific condition for wild vegetation and the cultivation of important species of plants. After the dam work started, "The fertility of the surrounding soil has decreased. The drought means that there are fewer vegetable gardens, which is a form of domestic work that gave women a significant role. This means that women have to leave their local space and work outside" (PQ_Interview 1).

The impacts on land, flora and fauna are not only due to modifications in land use but also to pollution, as in the case of the El Gallo Dam Project in Mexico (Sin Embargo, 2017). In the area of the Palo Viejo Dam in Guatemala, rivers have dried up, while subsistence horticulture on their banks is not viable anymore, which threatens food sovereignty in the Ixil Mayan communities of Cotzal (PV_Interview 1). Land can notoriously be greatly impacted by flooding near large hydropower projects, such as in the case of El Quimbo, where 8586 ha of land were flooded, 95% of which are part of the Protected Forest Reserve of the Amazon and the Colombian Plateau (Dussán Calderón, 2017).

Our data show multiple grievances over lacking or uncompleted Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA). When carried out, EIAs do not take into account the complex web of relations that sustain local and regional ecosystems, or are done in a fragmented fashion, such as in the

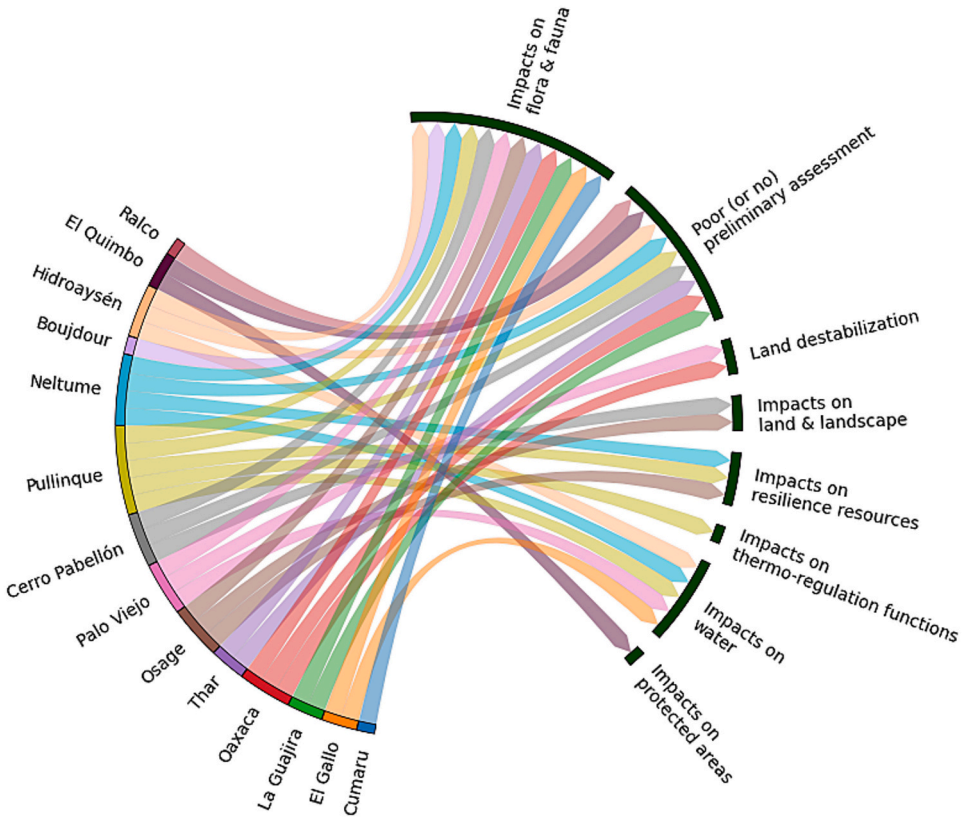


Fig. 2. Map of environmental dimension. The figure shows the relations of each case to the sub-nodes of this category.

case of Oaxaca Wind Plants in Mexico (OX_Interview 1). Similar criticisms were raised in relation with the evaluation methodology of environmental impacts such as in the case of [Chile's] Neltume Dam, which "(…) works with a very one-dimensional logic, and it considers as a premise that all environmental impacts can be repaired, mitigated, or compensated" (NL_Interview 1).

Depletion of water sources is another major impact reported in multiple cases. In the aforementioned Rajasthan case, one of the main concerns is the excessive use of water for the regular maintenance and clean-up of the solar panels, in a region where there is a chronic water scarcity. The issue is further aggravated by the influx of more people and workers in small villages where infrastructure is not ready to meet extra food and water needs (RJ_Interview 2).

5.2. Socio-economic dimension

The category of socio-economic dimension is broad, and includes impacts on the economy, lifestyle, social relations, and the territory of affected groups.

Our results show that the disruption of traditional economies and lifestyle is a frequent impact across cases, often associated with loss of livelihood (Fig. 3). For the case of the Cumaru Wind Plant in Brazil, farmers and women's groups, trade unions, and social movements denounced the installation of wind parks for threatening their food sovereignty, and their means of livelihood (Carneiro, 2022). In Neltume, recreational activities for tourism were disrupted (NL_Interview 1). Food sovereignty was affected around the Pullinque, Ralco and Palo Viejo dam projects, causing forced displacement or forcing especially women to travel longer distances to find food (PQ_Interview 1; RL_Interview 1; PV_Interview 1).

Strong out-migration trends were also generated due to the Rajasthan Project, with cash compensations and rewards, leading younger generations (often men) to migrate to cities, abandon their families., and often fall into alcoholism (RJ_Interview 2).

In the cases of Pangue and Ralco Dams (both in Chile), displacement was forced, and local communities were uprooted from their homes (PG_Interview 1). In Colombia for El Quimbo, forced displacement was associated with military repression (Dussán Calderón, 2017, p. 69–74).

In the case of wind plants in Oaxaca, the projects have caused changes in land use patterns, including privatisation which has also negatively affected the socio-economic life of local communities (OX_Interview 1). Inadequate compensation emerges as another major complaint, with the company not fulfilling its agreements and offering low monetary sums, as in the cases of Pullinque and El Quimbo. In El Gallo, compensation agreements with local fishers and farmers were not fulfilled (Sin Embargo, 2017) (Sin Embargo, 2017).

Unfair cost-benefit sharing was pointed out as a key feature of most megaprojects where the electricity is exported away from the production site to fuel industrial hubs and corridors, leaving local people with no electricity and depleted water sources. This is the case for El Gallo (García, 2013), as well as for the Palo Viejo Dam (PV_Interview 1), the plants in Oaxaca, Pangue, Ralco, and the HidroAysén project in Chile.

5.3. Health-related dimension

The health-related dimension includes psychological wellbeing and human and environmental health (Fig. 4).

Severe headaches due to noise pollution are largely documented around the Osage Wind Plant (News on 6, 2014). A rise in depression and anxiety disorders is documented in Cumaru, related to the noise generated by turbines. The constant attacks against opposers caused strong fear and dread, leading to long-term psychological disorders (OLCA, 2012). Extreme situations of distress were found around Pangue and Ralco Dams, where the profound wound caused by the loss of land, means of livelihood, language, and community relationships is considered the root cause of the high rate of suicides, depression, and

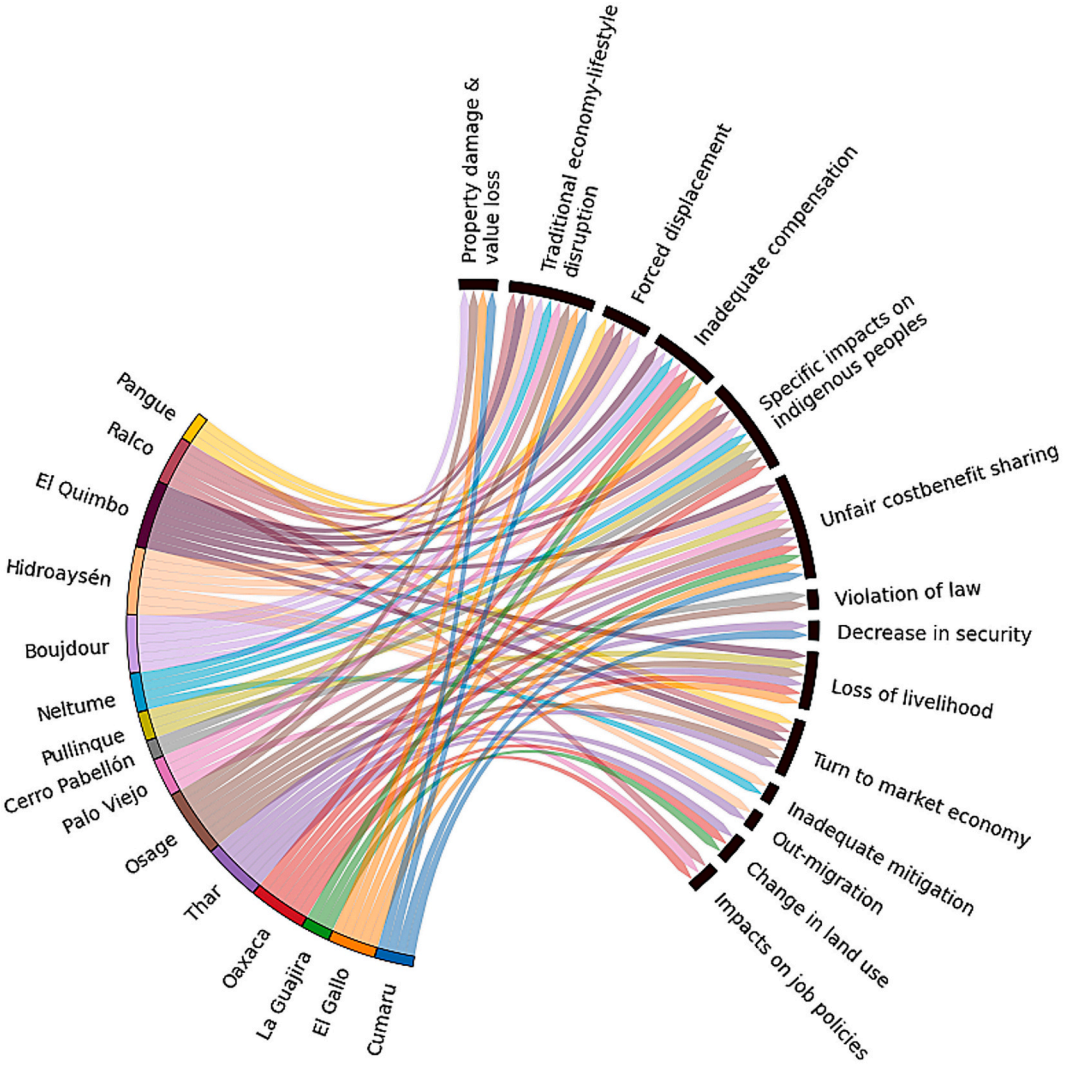


Fig. 3. Map of socio-economic dimension. The figure shows the relations of each case to the sub-nodes of this category.

alcoholism in Chile's Pehuenche Indigenous peoples (CEME, 2010; RL_Interview 1).

These health impacts have been largely ignored by Enel, as they were not considered directly associated with the projects but developed over time. Enel's sustainability reports only mention the health of employees and claim that it has its own Health and Safety management system that complies with the British Standard for occupational health and safety management system (BS OHSAS, officially replaced in 2018 by the international ISO 45001), and with the company's goal of developing its own services for health care and education in the Global South (Enel, 2021a).

5.4. Ontological dimension

The ontological dimension captures the ways in which local communities view and interact with their worlds, underpinning the different ways in which RE projects and their impacts are valued by the company and by the communities (Fig. 5).

An example of that is the distinction between 'land' and 'territory': while Enel quantifies land as something that is interchangeable and replaceable – thus justifying, for example, forced displacement followed by compensation by some other land – territories and homes cannot be quantified with numbers and hectares according to the affected communities: that is, they are viewed as incommensurable.

This distinction was evident in the cases of Pangue and Ralco. Our interviewee emphasised the tight relationship communities used to have with their local ecology and animals, as making one interconnected being. Their existence and spirituality were tightly connected to the territory they inhabit (RL_Interview 1). The company tried to convince local communities that the land compensation package would improve their lives but failed to understand the incommensurability of the relationships with the territory: "The company started lobbying, telling us that our houses are small, they have dirt floors, and that if we build Ralco we are going to triple the land. That is to say, if you have 20 hectares of land for crops and livestock, we are going to give you 60 or 70. And those lands will have houses, sheds, electricity, they will have basic services to their homes, they will be closer to the city, their children will have a better education, and their living conditions will improve a lot in general." (RL_Interview 1). Opponents of the project tried to explain to the company that it was not the land or houses that they claimed, but their *territory*. In the end, they were offered more hectares of land than they had before but less suitable for human dwelling and animals, and with little water sources. Commons were lost, traditional sense of collaboration among people weakened due to general mistrust, lots of people became alcohol-addicted or depressed, and several committed suicide (RL_Interview 1).

The relationship with territory and landscape often has a strong spiritual dimension. For the case of Osage, the landscape "where the sky

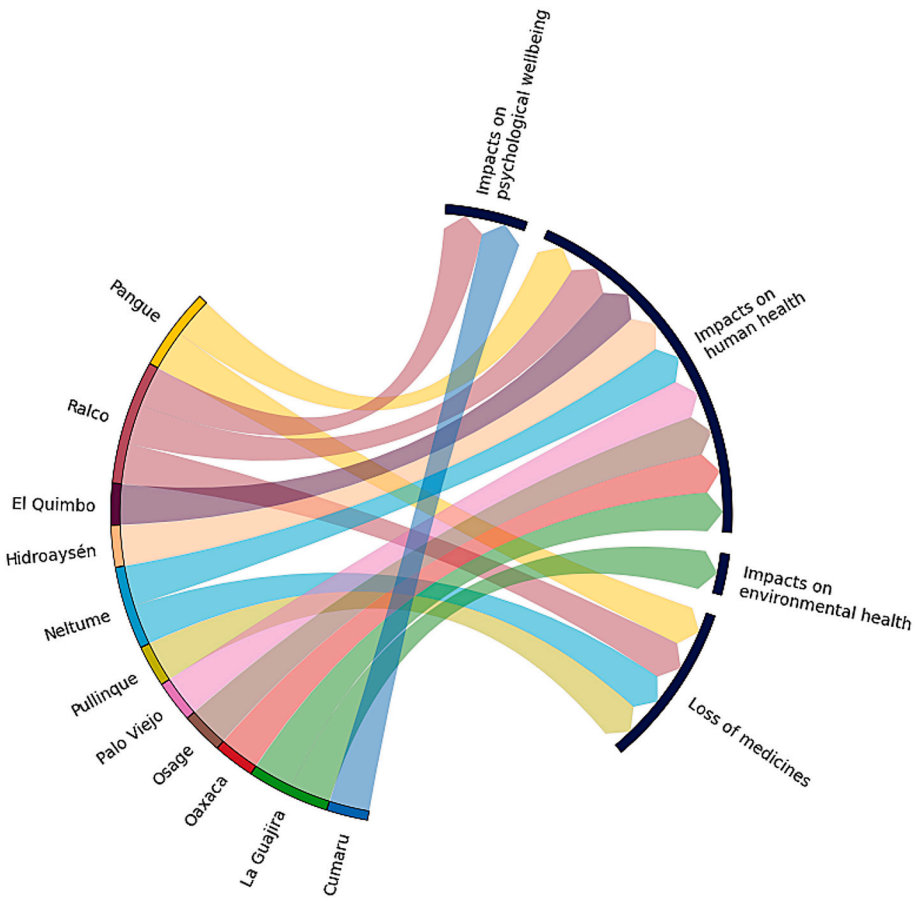


Fig. 4. Map of the health-related dimension. The figure shows the relations of each case to the sub-nodes of this category.

and the earth join at the horizon", is of spiritual importance to the First Nations, as it represents the place "where they come from" and the place of ancestors, and is worshipped during sunset ceremonies (Le Coz and Sherman, 2017). This spiritual dimension has been largely ignored and never mentioned in sustainability reports, despite frequent encroachment over ceremonial or burying grounds, such as in the cases of Pullinque, Osage, Ralco, El Quimbo, HidroAysén, Neltume, Cerro Pabellón, and La Guajira.

The relationship of communities to rivers and other water bodies clash with company's extractivist logic. This was apparent for the case of Pangue, as stated by our interviewee: "(…) for us, the Mapuche, it is not possible to stop a river, since everything that is natural has to flow its natural course. So it is impossible to cut the flow of the river, as this would be like stopping time, or making life not flow, so it is different when viewed from our perspective" (RL_Interview 1).

These strong ontological clashes lead to different perceptions of who has a right over which territories. This was clearly pointed out in the case of Palo Viejo: "We are Mayan Communities and Pueblos with our own histories, values, and norms; we seek a relationship among equals. We have ancestral rights over the mountains, the forests and the rivers that would produce the millionaire business of electric energy" (OMAL, 2012).

5.5. Political dimension

The political dimension refer to unequal power relations between the company and communities, particularly disparities in economic power, and the inclusiveness and the transparency in the decision-making process, which are at the core of all contentious cases (Fig. 6).

A recurring feature of unequal power dynamics is community fragmentation, often caused by the monetary flows and economic compensations introduced by the company. In the case of Pullinque, the community was divided by an individualised fashion of bargaining compensations and awards (Comparini and Acuña, 2019). In La Guajira (Colombia), similarly, the company's compensation policies resulted in community division, the creation of rivalries, and eventually several episodes of violent inter-community attacks and conflicts (Gonzalez Posso and Barney, 2019). The same pattern emerged in Palo Viejo, where the company generated conflicts by "(…) offering some form of compensation that gave incentives to corrupt mayors. To date, the communities have not received any form of compensation. Companies become sponsors of corruption" (PV_Interview 1). Strong community conflicts are also lamented for the case of Neltume: "The internal situation is serious, there are conflicts between families and communities, threats against families, women and elders, carried out by hostile, violent groups, due to the interventionism of the transnational company, which has co-opted certain people of the sector that today act as operators in favour of the company" (NL_Interview 1).

In the case of Cumaru, women's groups particularly expressed concerns over the violence they suffer on the fields due to outside workers and the sense of insecurity due to the new roads into their territory (Carneiro, 2022). Violence against women was also found in the cases of Boujdour (Western Sahara) and Oaxaca. Violence also manifested in the form of death threats, violent repression and criminalisation of social leaders.

When contrasting Enel's claims with impacts on the ground, a strong point of contention is found in relation to transparency of information and communication. Enel claims open communication with communities in its Human Rights Policy (Enel, 2021b). However, lack of transparency was found in the promises made to communities. In terms of communication, Enel set up specific channels to address concerns with communities, such as in the case of El Quimbo, but this was often

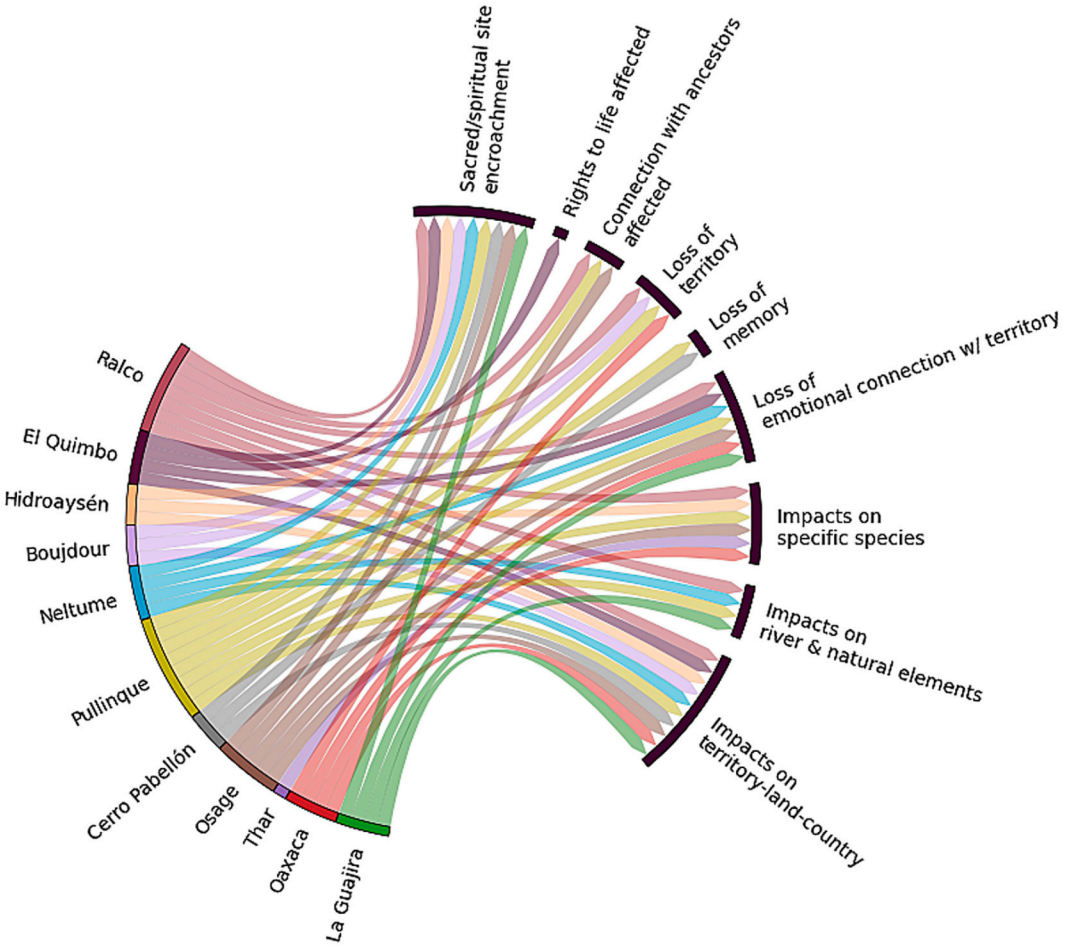


Fig. 5. Map of ontological dimension. The figure shows relations of each case to the sub-nodes of this category.

conducted in superficial ways, and not taking into account the tense political context. In the case of the Boujdour Wind Plant in Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara, Enel claims to have provided anonymous access to channels of complaints from workers and the Sahrawi community; to have consulted vulnerable groups within the Sahrawi population in the local language; and to have hired around 200 unskilled Sahrawi workers (Enel, 2022). However, the company did not consult the Polisario Front, which the European Court of Justice has recognised as the only representative of the Sahrawi People, thus acquiescing to Moroccan occupation (Cantoni, 2026). This led the NGO Western Sahara Resource Watch to question the legality of Enel projects in Western Sahara (WSRW, 2021). In July 2023, nevertheless, the Boujdour plant became operative.

Lack of proper consultation was also a recurring issue across the analysed cases. In the case of Palo Viejo, according to local communities, the dam was imposed without due consultation in violation of the Constitution and the ILO Convention 169, and the compensations promised by the company were perceived as charity and not the result of dignified and just negotiations between two parties of equal status (Escalón, 2012).

6. Discussion

This counter-accounting exercise has provided evidence of profound concerns among affected communities that challenge the supposed pursuit of a 'shared value' by Enel. Impacted people defend instead a 'plurality of values' expressed in diverse languages of valuation that are de facto misrecognised. These valuation languages relate to the main tenets of environmental justice as they span across environmental, socio-economic, and health-related impacts, but also involve ontological and political considerations. We discuss here how these intersect distribution, participation, recognition and capabilities principles and why their analysis represents an important bottom-up approach to contest corporate sustainability claims.

Issues of distributive injustice emerge in several cases concerning the magnitude and spatial extension of the infrastructure, and the lack of benefits for local people, such as access to electricity. RE infrastructures are embedded in wider spatial political economies that link extraction sites, often within Indigenous jurisdiction areas, to electricity export corridors and distant centres of urban or industrial demand. Local communities bear environmental and social costs, which reinforce patterns of territorial sacrifice. Oaxaca wind farms and HidroAysén, in particular, represent national emblems of electricity extractivism and sacrifice zones in the name of green transition (Avila Calero, 2017; Dunlap, 2017; Cantoni, 2025). To this form of extractivism, Boujdour adds the complexity of an internationally recognised occupation and the violation of Indigenous sovereignty, turning the Sahrawi territory into an electricity basket for Morocco and the European market (Alkhalili et al., 2023). The Ixil Maya communities around Palo Viejo also condemn the colonial character of the dam that violates Indigenous rights, cultures and languages for the benefit of the national elites, transnational corporations, and the international energy market (Batz, 2024). Distributive and recognition forms of injustice have also been expressed in terms of unfair burdens on non-human species and a wholly anthropocentric perspective informing impact assessments and cost-benefit sharing models. The Pangue, Ralco, and Pullinque cases show how flora and fauna only have some value recognised as humans-serving workforce or source of food but are not considered as

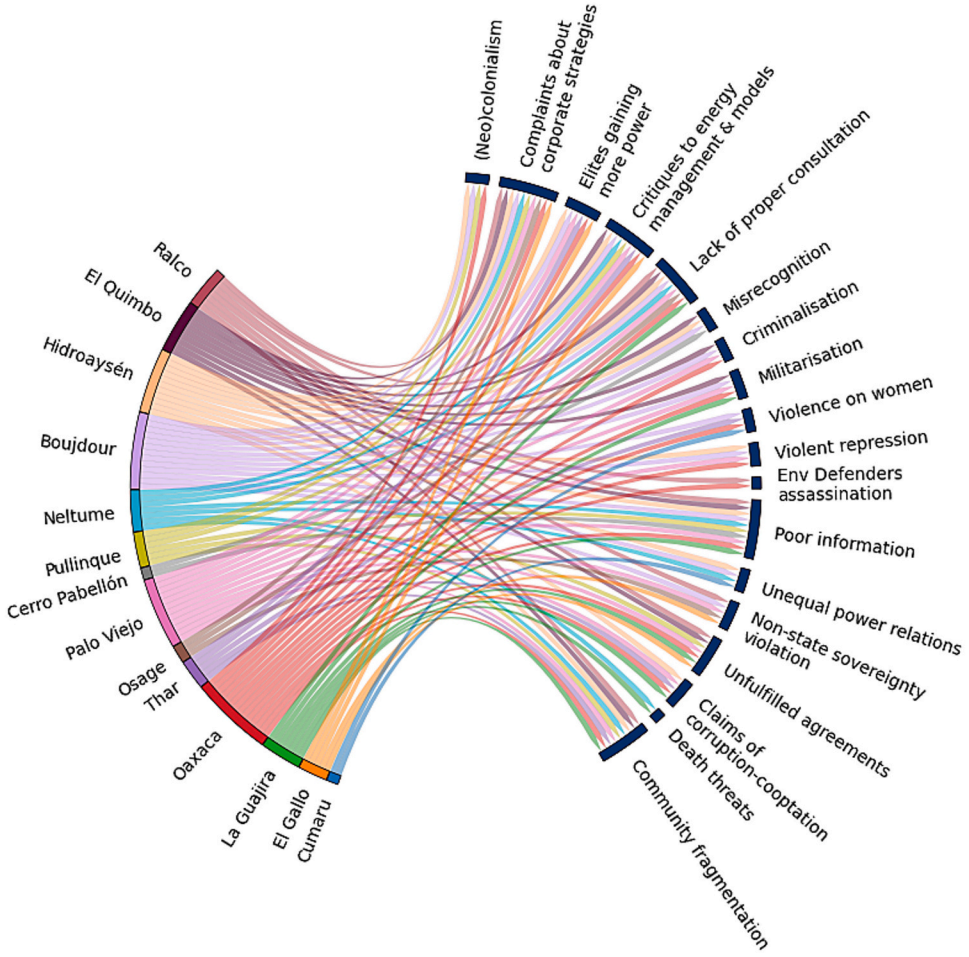


Fig. 6. Map of the political dimension. The figure shows the relations of each case to the sub-nodes of this category.

part of an ecosystem of life in the planning phase or at the time of assessing the needs of a territory.

As demonstrated by a large body of literature for the last decades, large-scale hydropower projects are more commonly associated with forced displacement, cumulative ecological impacts, land submergence, and long-lasting harm to collective capabilities (see Crow-Miller et al., 2017; Villamayor-Tomas et al., 2026). Yet, wind and solar projects, while often framed as less invasive, also lead to land privatisation and enclosure, fragmented compensation schemes, and weak consultation processes. A comparative reading, therefore, suggests that the form of dispossession across technologies might vary but the underlying corporate and extractivist logic – subordinating community values and territorial relationships to investment returns and national energy strategies - remains constant across all three. It concludes that this requires a fundamental rethinking of who should make decisions about the redesign of energy systems and how their territorial impacts should be governed.

In terms of participation and the procedural dimension of injustice, all cases express concerns about the way EIAs were conducted, especially concerning the lack of prior information and inclusion of potentially impacted communities, fragmentation and decontextualisation of the projects from its surrounding social, economic, and ecological environments (Carneiro, 2022; Gonzalez Posso and Barney, 2019). Communities have also been fragmented through Enel CSV discourse, when it centres on the role of individuals as potential local entrepreneurs, leaders, or experts, hence creating value only around entrepreneurship or individualised educational projects (such as individual scholarships) instead of distributing benefits collectively to the community (Comparini and Acuña, 2019; Gonzalez Posso and Barney, 2019).

The crosscutting dimension of recognition justice can be found across all grievances. One recurrent claim is the plurality of values and the understanding of the territory as a web of relationships and knowledge systems. The loss of medicine plants like those in the Mapuche territory, the disturbance of spirituality associated with a sacred place, and the disruption of the specific functions of locations, such as the Thuf Thuf waterfall, are not only considered environmental impacts. They demonstrate the rupture of a network of relationships, values, and meanings, a violation of the possibility and responsibility to take care of one's health and to connect with the spiritual strength of the place (Escobar, 2020). The misrecognition of one's connection to the territory and the colonial arrogance of dismissing homes for their material condition or location becomes a strategy for legitimising the uprooting of people, the occupation of a contested land, and the creation of a top-down narrative for development and progress.

Relationality and plurality of values are recurrent features in the claims for dignified and meaningful lives. Forced displacement such as in the case of Pangue and Ralco generates levels of suffering that have not been healed even after decades and that manifest themselves in minds, bodies, and relationships. The disappearance of plants, animals, and territories, or the encroachment on archaeological and spiritual grounds, breaks the relationship between the historical identity of a community and their source of life, often expressed at the same time in terms of ecosystems, knowledge systems, and the presence of ancestors in an interconnected fashion (OMAL, 2012). It is not just a collateral impact that can be compensated with relocation but a wound in the dignity and identity of local communities that jeopardises the very

ontological premises of a meaningful existence, and, therefore, the collective capability of a dignified life in relation to, or inter-existing with, the whole territory.

The diversity and plurality of values and value systems expressed in our data strongly question Enel's CSV claims. As the definition and the narrative around the 'value' of RE and the energy transition are defined by the corporation itself, this strategy represents a moral version of CSR, where the company does not only undertake minor compensatory activities to make its operations more acceptable but reframes its very *raison d'être* around a *value*, establishing it as concerted among all parties. This way, CSV becomes an upgrade of corporate discursive strategies that aim to legitimise, including retrospectively to projects developed before 2015, the firm's mandate in the energy transition, while sidelining uncomfortable justice and political issues. Such legitimating discourse does not, however, operate in a vacuum but thrives in the combination of enabling factors, such as favourable governments (national and local), authoritarian regimes, weak regulatory frameworks, justificatory and demobilising narratives fuelled by 'there is no alternative' discourses, among others.

Our results call for a different framework for creating energy futures, one where plural value systems and relational approaches shape and govern desirable scenarios, while accountability principles and ethical benchmarks are determined by all affected actors. Recent literature suggested a transformative approach in the way EIAs are performed while considering plural relational values (Brombal et al., 2026). The way community-run or cooperative-run small-scale projects have integrated plural aspects of convivial life (environmental, historical, and decolonial reparation, and relational ways of being, among others) in the design of fair and democratic energy has also been documented (Post et al., 2025; Soler-Villamizar and Rankin, 2021). During this research, we learned that Ixil and Mapuche Indigenous communities around Palo Viejo and Pullinque projects, for example, are already exploring ways of generating their own electricity through micro-hydro systems to fulfil needs that the national state has ignored for centuries and according to values that are profoundly different from corporate mission (PV_Interview 1; PQ_Interview 1). These initiatives call for further research and academic-comunitarian partnerships to explore what diverse energy transitions are possible (and already materialising) when the role of large companies is decentralised, and projects are designed and governed according to plural and relational value systems.

7. Conclusions

Through a counter-accounting and bottom-up approach, we analysed 15 contentious RE projects of the Enel Group and the concerns expressed by the impacted communities through their diverse valuation languages from a perspective of environmental justice. We found severe misalignments between corporate valuation frameworks and plural community-grounded values. We argued that the corporate discourse around the creation of a supposed 'shared value' is confronted by a plurality of values and world views, articulated in environmental, health related, socio-economic, political and ontological terms. Forms of environmental injustice related to distribution, participation, recognition, and capabilities principle are found across all cases. We suggest that CSV represents a moral version of CSR where the company becomes a bearer of an assumingly 'shared' value, not only of legal responsibility. While this study focuses on extra-European projects belonging to a EU-based corporation, the patterns resonate with broader dynamics observed in corporate-led renewable energy expansion. The findings on corporate valuation reductionism, misrecognition of relational and Indigenous values, and procedural exclusion via instruments like CSV are generalisable to many other large-scale corporate and financial actors in shareholder-driven energy governance, including in the European context, where similar conflicts over wind and solar siting have increasingly been documented (see Greenpeace, 2024; Balestrieri, 2026). This suggests that the conflictual issues identified in this research are structural rather than exceptional. We eventually call for further research into the ethics and a plural-values governance approach for just energy scenarios that are community-grounded and informed by plural and relational values and worldviews. Examples include, but are not limited to, meaningful co-decision authority for affected communities rather than consultative roles; redesigned EIAs that recognise relational, ontological, and non-anthropocentric values; collectively determined and structurally embedded benefit-sharing; and active support for community-governed energy models as legitimate components of just energy systems.

Notes

Luiss Business School. ADesempio – Incontro con Francesco Starace. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLFnZZ5K6w4. Accessed on 20.05.2025

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Daniela Del Bene: Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Roberto Cantoni:** Writing – original draft, Validation, Software, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Bontempi Antonio:** Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Software, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Louisa Jane Di Felice:** Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Software, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Giuseppina Siciliano:** Writing – original draft, Validation, Software, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.

org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2026.109268.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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