

Contested landscapes in Sardinia: Heritage and ethnic identity under Italian green resource nationalism



Department of Archaeology
University of Cambridge

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Preface

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration, except where specifically indicated in the text. This dissertation is 15,500 words and does not exceed the word limit stipulated by the Degree Committee for Archaeology, Anthropology and Sociology.

Abstract

The interplay between cultural heritage and group identity is a multifaceted phenomenon that gains particular significance in the case of ethnic identities. Nation-building policies of cultural homogenisation haven't always succeeded in incorporating ethnic minorities within the nation-state by replacing their sense of belonging with that of national identity.

The Mediterranean island of Sardinia, a region of Italy, presents a compelling case study in this regard. The Sardinian population's enduring sense of ethnic identity—distinctive and potentially in conflict with national identity—appears to be ignited around issues of heritage, in particular in response to a perceived threat coming from the outside.

This research seeks to investigate the role of heritage in this conflict between Sardinian and Italian identity, taking as a case-study the ongoing grassroots mobilisation against large-scale wind energy projects on the island. Here I focus on the land and landscape as forms of heritage for the Sardinian people and I investigate the development of their ethnic identity through this crucial experience of living-in-the-place. With this research, I aim to deepen our understanding of the persistence of ethnic minorities within nation-states, despite national assimilationist policies.

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1. Introduction

The island of Sardinia is the second-largest in the Mediterranean Sea and one of the two island regions of Italy, together with Sicily. Ever since the unification of the country, Sardinia has been characterised by autonomist or separatist claims, emerging periodically in the public discourse and political arena.

The population of this island maintains a strong ethnic identity: Sardinians consider themselves as a people, despite lack of recognition from the State. The contrast between Sardinian and Italian identity is experienced in different and sometimes contradictory ways (Carta and Ciarlo, 2012) and generates what has been called an ‘ethno-national cleavage’ (Pala, 2016): that is, a socio-political fracture whose reasons lie primarily in this conflict of identities. In this context, the rich cultural heritage of Sardinia appears to have a role that is yet to be investigated.

A pilot study I conducted on the regional media between December 2022 and January 2023 to track down the ethno-national conflict in the public discourse showed it mobilised around issues that are key to identity; cultural heritage appeared to be the most powerful of such mobilisers (Corona, 2023). Among the heritage-themed articles, one issue in particular ignited strong identity claims in reaction to a perceived threat from the outside: the increasing number of wind farm projects carried out by Italian and foreign corporations on the island. Grassroot mobilisation against them was on the rise, and is now still ongoing.

Opposition to large-scale renewable energy projects has already emerged elsewhere, in and outside Europe (see Avila (2018)). In Sardinia, activists argue that these projects are only aimed at securing the Recovery Plan funds allocated for the energy transition: not only their total capacity far exceeds the energy requirements of the island, but the infrastructures necessary to

store the energy or transport it outside Sardinia do not yet exist, while those planned (Terna, 2022) are expensive and impactful (GrIG, 2022). What is unique of Sardinia is the way this opposition relates to nationalism and the ethnic conflict.

In this research I will attempt to address this case-study as a proxy for the role of cultural heritage in the identity conflict that traverses Sardinian society. I will do so from a Heritage Studies perspective, employing a qualitative research methodology.

With this piece of work, I aspire to contribute to a deeper understanding of the interrelation between heritage and ethnic identities in light of the ongoing political and socio-economic changes related to the threat of global climate change. I investigate this within the system of nation-states, questioning in particular how and why ethnic minorities are maintained despite longstanding nationalistic policies aimed at their cultural assimilation.

2. Theoretical Background

The central question I want to answer with this research is:

What is the role of heritage in the conflict between Sardinian identity and Italian national identity as emerging around recent disputes over wind farm projects on the island?

To answer this question, I have identified three research aims. Each deals with issues of heritage that intertwine with broader topics investigated within other fields, notably **human geography, environmental psychology and studies of nationalism and ethnic conflicts**. The theoretical background is thus interdisciplinary, and heritage is the *fil rouge* connecting these approaches. The research is thus broken down into three main aims, each building up on the previous one.

2.1. Research Aim (i)

(i) To inform an understanding of the Sardinian land and landscape as full-fledged forms of cultural heritage for Sardinian people, in particular those inhabiting small villages in rural areas.

Aim (i) deals with the relationship between *people and place*: this is indeed a heritage studies topic, but not one of the most heavily discussed and investigated (see Howard and Graham, 2008). Within debates in the field, the question of whether places can be considered forms of heritage tends to be reduced to issues of management, typically revolving around the concept of ‘cultural landscape’ recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site category in 1992.

This category acknowledges the interdependence between humans and natural environment in creating modern landscapes, and it includes places that lack evidence of human activity but are endowed with religious, artistic or cultural significance (UNESCO, 2021). While such debates contribute to questioning the fictitious divide between natural and cultural when recognising and managing places as heritage (Larsen and Wijesuriya, 2017), they ultimately reduce this recognition to few, selected locations that are (or could be) granted the status of WHSs.

In this research, instead, I am interested in the **significance of place for those living in it regardless of its representativeness**: specifically, whether, how and why places stand as forms of heritage for place-based people. This means coming back to the everyday life—the daily experience of being-in-the-place—as the space where this significance is created.

Few heritage scholars have dealt with this issue and have usually done so by drawing on previous research in human geography and philosophy of space and place. In the introduction to her renowned book *Uses of Heritage*, Laurajane Smith writes about her ethnographic

observation within a group of Aboriginal women in Australia, and she notices that the fact of being in a place that was important to them (“being in place”) was itself a form of “heritage work” with which these women were engaging (Smith, 2006, p. 1). Drawing on the writings of philosopher Edward Casey (1996) and geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) on the role of perception in the experience of being-in-place, she argues that physical places and landscapes have an ‘affect’ in that they influence people’s sense of identity, by acting as props for the making of memories, meanings and experiences that bind groups together.

Nevertheless, her focus is ultimately on this ‘process’ of remembering (and renewing those memories and associations) through the experience of place, rather than on the place itself: in her view, the process is heritage, not the location(s) where the experience of living unfolds. Besides, her analysis is focused on a very specific type of place only: “places of heritage” (Smith, 2006, p. 2), “heritage as place, or ‘heritage places’” (*Ibid.*, p. 77), which stand as alternatives to the more customary term of heritage ‘sites’. These proposed categories of ‘place’ mirror the idea of speciality that comes with that of heritage ‘site’ as well: they refer to *certain* places, because of the heritage processes that occur, and are triggered, at and around them; places that stand out from others due to their significance.

Geographer David Lowenthal, renowned for establishing Heritage studies as an academic discipline, instead devoted much of his early work to investigating the everyday relationship between people and all place as generally understood, in particular the human perception of the landscape and the relations between the outside world and these “pictures in our heads”. He argued that human beings experience the world not through perception only (that is, via the senses) but also through memory, feeling, logic and faith combined, so that every experience generates “private worlds” that are “irreducibly unique” (Lowenthal, 1961, pp. 241, 258).

In later works, he became interested in the role of landscapes for identity: specifically, landscape as a form of heritage (“landscape-as-heritage” and “heritage landscape” (Lowenthal, 1998, pp. 7, 88)) that is crucial for some national identities (Lowenthal and Prince, 1964). He was particularly concerned with the ways in which heritage, inherited by the individual, becomes collective when is shared with others: the family, the community, the ethnic group, the nation. Yet when it comes to the landscape, his ideas about the transition from the experienced to the inherited are unclear. This very gap is of interest for this research, because it concerns why and how some places are (or become¹) heritage, worthy of being inherited and passed on.

Studies on the significance of places of living for humans are better found in the fields of human geography, in which Lowenthal was first trained, and environmental psychology. In the early stage of the crafting of my research, I came across the use of the ‘cultural landscape’ concept outside of the UNESCO debate, either (or both) to describe traces of human activity in the environment or “the cultural meanings that humans attach to their physical surroundings” (Jones, 2003, p. 32). While this description overlaps with that of UNESCO, in this case it leads to the conclusion that nearly *all* landscapes are ‘cultural’ in practice: not only because humans have impacted and modified (directly and indirectly) the whole world (Head, 2000), but because potentially all places can be charged with cultural meanings (Jones, 2003)

¹ For the debate on whether things are or become heritage see Solli et al. (2011).

The category of cultural landscape thus seemed adequate to describe the relationship between rural people and their surroundings in Sardinia, particularly because of how recurrent the concern towards the visual impact of the wind turbines on Sardinian landscape seemed to be in the media². Nevertheless, during the second part of the research (the ethnographic observation), I came to acknowledge that the visual aspect of the land, although relevant, was neither the only nor the main one to be felt as altered by the construction of the wind turbines, and sometimes wasn't even mentioned by local residents when discussing their negative impacts. The concept of cultural landscape—where 'landscape' typically stands for that which is *seen*—did not seem to fully grasp the significance of the land for local people (i.e., its heritage 'value') that was perceived as threatened by the projects.

I thus eventually turned to **theories of place attachment** as reviewed in Lewicka (2011) as those that best dealt with this issue: i.e., the emotional aspect that dictates the significance of places to people and how this attachment is developed. I approach these theories from a Heritage studies perspective, by focusing on the elements of the land and landscape that people identify as important, deemed to be preserved and transmitted. As the core theoretical background for my research aim (i) I take Tuan's seminal works (1975, 1976, 1977) on the crucial role of the experience of place for human life and I integrate it with Stedman's (2003) criticism of the constructivist argument to explain the development of a sense of place.

² As I observed in the pilot study (see Introduction).

In his widely cited paper *Place: An Experiential Perspective* (1975), Tuan uses ‘experience’ to describe the long-term process through which a person gets to *know* her world with her senses and thought. The experiences that make a place³ “intimately known” are those that “grow imperceptibly with each subconscious imprint of taste, smell, and touch, and with unheralded acts” that are “daily compounded”. These are “deeply felt” perceptions, “barely registered but omnipresent”, “common experiences of life that may add up to a profound sense of place” (Tuan, 1975, p. 158).

This concept of experience extends to the past: while “to know a place is also to know the past”, Tuan argues that the collective past of those sharing the same living place (i.e., the “communal past”) “is not truly one’s own past unless history extends without break into personal memories; and neither is vividly present unless objectified in things that can be seen and touched, that is, directly experienced” (Tuan, 1975, p. 164). This mirrors Smith’s argument on affect—specifically, how places of heritage work for the transmission of memories:

“The meanings and memories of past human experiences are (...) remembered through contemporary interactions with physical places and landscapes, and through the performances enacted within them—and with each new encounter with

³ He was talking about neighbourhoods in urban areas; but this could apply to any place that is small enough to be experienced directly.

place, with each new *experience* of place, meanings and memories may subtly, or otherwise, be rewritten or remade” (Smith, 2006, p. 77, emphasis added).

This explains very clearly why places of living can be considered forms of cultural heritage for their inhabitants. While authors debate the processes (the ‘hows’) through which people become attached to places, they tend to agree that time spent in the place is crucial for the development of emotional attachment (Lewicka, 2011), particularly when the “long residence” is coupled with “deep involvement” in life in the place (Tuan, 1975, p. 164). Tuan’s view on the experience of perceiving the place as deeply emotional overlaps Lowenthal’s ideas on the central role of *feeling* for people’s individual ‘private worlds’ (Lowenthal, 1961; Tuan, 1975, 1976, 1977): these support the argument that long-term life-in-the-place generates memories that are significant, charged with deeply emotional meanings.

On this note, I draw on Seamon’s (1980) concepts of ‘body-ballet’ and ‘time-space routines’, that describe movement as central to the development of place-related emotions, emphasising daily interactions with the place as remembered as well as embodied. This in turn supports Stedman’s (2003) argument around the importance of the **physical reality of place**: in his view, sense of place is not (only) a product of shared behaviours and cultural processes but the result of the material reality of physical environments which heavily contributes to the shaping of human behaviour. This theoretical background substantiates my claim that physical alterations of the land and landscape have a ripple effect in terms of damage to the heritage of place-based people, such as the rural Sardinians that are the focus of my research.

2.2. Research Aim (ii)

(ii) To explore the relationship between heritage and identity by examining whether needs for protection and claims for ownership of the land and landscape ignite feelings of Sardinian-ness, and whether, vice-versa, perceptions of Sardinian-ness inform those needs and claims in the first place.

I start from the premise that a correlation between cultural heritage and Sardinian identity exists, as I observed in the pilot study of the media discourse (see Introduction). There is general acknowledgement among heritage scholars that heritage contributes to the everyday negotiation of identity, whether at the level of the individual or the group (e.g., Lowenthal, 1994; Smith, 2006; Graham and Howard, 2008), and that memory has a crucial role in this process; although authors tend to disagree on how it works (e.g., Assmann, 2009; Anheier and Raj Isar, 2011). What interests me here is **how the experience of living in the place locally** and developing a local, village-bounded, identity **relates to the feeling of belonging to a broad, regional place (the island) and its ethnic community.**

To this aim, I draw on theories from the field of nationalism studies and I integrate them again with studies on place attachment and Aleida Assmann's (2009) theories around the nature and formation of 'collective memories', widely cited in heritage studies. Studies on nationalism are the necessary reference when dealing with ethnic identities, particularly when in conflict with the national identity, but they lack analysis on the role of cultural heritage—or, otherwise said, on the uses of "the past, and collective and individual memories, to negotiate new ways of being and expressing identity" (Smith, 2006, pp. 4–5).

Scholars of nationalism have long acknowledged the role of the past in building national identities: in particular, the ideas of a glorious and antique origin of the Nation and that of a common national history and culture (see in particular Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) and Anderson (1983)). For the purpose of nation-building, ethnic differences within nation-states are targeted and counteracted through manifold strategies, some of which address such differences as cultural specificities and weaponise culture for the integration, assimilation or annexation of the national citizen (McGarry and O’Leary, 1993; Kymlicka and Norman, 2000).

However, in recent years, the acknowledgement of such manipulations of culture to construct national identities has resulted into a tendency to use the constructivist argument to explain *all* group identities; this is particularly true for so-called ‘modernist’ scholars, who understand nations as a modern cognitive phenomenon. As a consequence, the group identity of those communities that are united by shared feelings of common past and land—so-called ‘ethnic’ groups (Conversi, 2002)—is considered as constructed, on a par with feelings of belonging to a nation-state. Hence, the **real, shared lived experience** of these place-based communities tends to be overlooked. I turn to theories of place attachment to challenge this tendency, by bringing to the fore the experience of living-in-the-place as crucial for the daily re-negotiation and maintenance of ethnic identities.

Tuan argues that “experience constructs place at different scales” and these places are “all centers of meaning to individuals and to groups”, from the small scale of the home to the big scale of the region, or the nation (Tuan, 1975, p. 153). All the places that extend beyond direct experience require to be imagined, i.e., constructed with thought. In Tuan’s view, regions are far too big to be experienced, but are easily imagined because of how accepted they are

conceptually, despite the fact that they don't have sharp borders that can be recognised on the ground (Tuan, 1975, 1976).

Indeed, this might apply to most of the regions in Italy; but not Sardinia (or Sicily) because of its geographical reality as an island—i.e., a place whose boundaries are very clearly, objectively and permanently defined by the sea. Sardinia more so than Sicily, which is very close to the mainland and historically targeted by plans to build a suspended bridge that would connect it to the rest of Italy. Tuan's argument that a large place is experienced through "the mind's eye" is thus particularly true for islands because, unlike other regions, they have boundaries that can "be pointed to in the field" (Tuan, 1975, p. 158).

I thus start from the premise that, whilst the island is not directly experienced in the everyday life due to its large size, the feeling of belonging to the place 'Sardinia' is not a construct of thought in the sense of 'building in the mind something that isn't really there'. In Tuan's view, thought is "the most active mode of human experiencing", that is, a "discriminating and constructive activity (that) creates patterns of reality" (Tuan, 1975, pp. 152, 158): it is thus one among other ways of experiencing what is real and exists in the world. Whilst multifaceted, complex and contradictory, **Sardinian identity⁴ is grounded in the *reality* of the island** as a bounded, distinct unit.

⁴ For the most recent studies on Sardinian identity, see Angioni *et al.* (2007).

Based on this reality, I investigate local attachment to place (result of direct experience) as indicative or at least related to the sense of attachment to the broad region (conceptualised in the mind) which is central to Sardinian ethnic identity. Here I don't aim to investigate why such identity developed in the first place, but whether it is maintained through the everyday life of living in the place.

Tuan suggests that people living in a large area could experience similar environment and livelihood: "In a large unit of space people may have common experiences of nature and work, feel the same cycles of heat and cold, see the same dusk, and smell the same air". While this doesn't necessarily develop into a common, regional consciousness, his explanation of how this consciousness would eventually develop is compelling: through *feelings*, that only later become a "shared lore and a shared body of explicit knowledge" (Tuan, 1975, p. 159)—or otherwise said, heritage.

Here we see again time, and in particular the accumulation of experiences and memories, returning as central in ideas around the development of group identities. Different models have been proposed in the academic literature on how memory is shared among members of a group (see Anheier and Raj Isar, 2011), and the very concept of 'collective memory' (Halbwachs, 1925) has been widely debated. On this note, I draw on Assmann's 'social memory' to explain the sharing of memories and stories within the small community subject of my research as happening through oral and other ephemeral interaction among family members, friends or neighbours and "grounded in lived experience (...) with human beings and their embodied interaction" (Assmann, 2009, pp. 213–216).

The emotional aspect of this experience of life in the place, and of receiving, developing and sharing memories within it, is brought to the fore in the chosen case-study by the grassroots

opposition against renewable energy projects that are threatening to change the place—i.e., the land and landscape. Studies of place attachment show that the stronger the emotional bonds with place, the fiercer the resistance to introduced changes that are perceived as detrimental to the meanings attached to the place, that is, to the place's identity (Devine-Wright and Howes, 2010; Lewicka, 2011).

2.2.1. Ethnic Identity and National Identity

To investigate this in relation to the ethnic identity in Sardinia also means to address where Sardinian-ness stands in relation to Italian-ness, as a sense of group identity that can be opposed or incorporated into that of nationality. A comparative survey conducted in 2013 on 6,000 people living in Sardinia shows that the population is split between those who embrace Sardinian identity as coexistent if not incorporated into Italian-ness and those who experience Sardinian-ness as opposed to Italian-ness (Mola *et al.*, 2013). Yet, not only is the feeling of Sardinian identity statistically prevalent over that of Italian nationality, but the vast majority of the respondents who identify as Italian report feeling Sardinian as well—or first and foremost Sardinian⁵.

⁵ As quoted in Pala (2016, p. 134), the survey (Mola *et al.*, 2013) shows the following results on the sense of belonging: “Sardinian only” 26%; “More Sardinian than Italian” 37%, “Equally Italian and Sardinian” 31%, “More Italian than Sardinian” 5%, “Italian only” 1%.

The same study shows that the territory is perceived as the most important element of Sardinian-ness, more so than the culture, language, cuisine, or regional history (Mola *et al.*, 2013, pp. 17-50). This further substantiates the place-based approach of this research for the study of the ethnic identity.

2.3. Research Aim (iii)

(iii) To explore the Italian nationalism that lies behind land management policies and the construction of renewable energy facilities in Sardinia, and whether these can be described as a form of use of heritage for nation-building.

If we start from the premise that the land and landscape are forms of cultural heritage for Sardinian rural communities (aim (i)) and that they have a crucial role for their local identity, while contributing to the maintenance of the ethnic identity (aim (ii)), then land management policies in Sardinia cannot but be matters of heritage and identity, as well. Here I intend to research these policies as happening in the context of the latent conflict between Sardinian and Italian identity, in continuity with the covert strategies historically deployed by the State to build-the-nation and the national citizen in the island.

Studies on Italian nationalism in Sardinia and its consequences for the local identity are few and don't thoroughly investigate culture as a specific field in which nation-building strategies are played out. Political scientist Carlo Pala (2016) mentions aggressive cultural policies in the historical process of Italianisation of Sardinia, in particular the large-scale literacy in Italian coupled with a consistent refusal to incorporate the Sardinian language in public administration

and schools⁶. These pressures have changed throughout the years as the Sardinian question has become less of a concern for the state while the obviousness⁷ of Italian nationality has grown.

As previously mentioned, homogenisation (or assimilation) are recognised as methods to eliminate cultural differences by compelling or pressuring citizens “to see themselves as members of a single, common national culture” (Kymlicka and Norman, 2000, p. 14). Yet ethnic identities do not necessarily need to be erased as long as subordinated communities are persuaded through hegemonic control to consider “unthinkable or unworkable” the contest for state power (McGarry and O’Leary, 1993, p. 23).

As classical works in the field of nationalism have argued (notably, Anderson, 2006), the ‘nation’ is never once and for all accomplished and needs continuous reproduction to be maintained. This considered, I draw on the concept of ‘**banal nationalism**’ developed by scholar Michael Billig (1995), who argues that nationalism is not a stage in the building of the nation that is overcome once the nation-state is established, but continues to be reproduced in the everyday life of the nation through processes that remain largely invisible.

At present, Italy could be described in the words of Billig as an “established nation”: that is, one that has “confidence in [its] own continuity”. As such, the national identity is “daily indicated, or ‘flagged’ in the lives of its citizenry” in a “banally mundane way”, rather than

⁶ For institutional debates around the status of the Sardinian language, see Pillonca (2020).

⁷ Concept taken from Angioni (2007) who described politically powerful identities as ‘obvious’.

through exceptional (scenic, or violent) nationalistic policies (Billig, 1995, pp. 6–8). In this research I focus on **state-led land-management policies in Sardinia as a matter of Italian nationalism** that happens as a form (among others) of daily **reproduction of common-sense assumptions regarding the nation** (Billig, 1995): its existence, its extension (its physicality as the ‘national territory’) and the expectations towards the behaviour of national citizens.

At first glance, renewable energy projects in Sardinia do not appear as forms of Italian nationalism, not only because the multinational companies behind them are frequently foreign, but mainly because of the discourses that underpin them: as measures to tackle climate change, they are meant to be intrinsically globally-oriented—thus, to go *beyond* the national interest. Other cases in which similar projects have faced opposition from local communities haven’t attracted much attention from scholars of nationalism and have mostly been researched as forms of environmental injustice, i.e., uneven distribution of the burdens of environmental policies⁸.

Relevant critical literature has been recently developed arguing that renewable energy projects, when non-community based, are forms of resource extraction that continue to follow capitalistic logics (see in particular Dunlap, 2018). Anthropologist Jaume Franquesa has addressed this issue by investigating the strategies through which companies “**devalue**” the economic and

⁸ On this topic, see the Global Atlas of Environmental Injustice, an academic-led project that records social conflicts around environmental issues the world over, including those against renewable energy plans (Temper *et al.*, 2015).

cultural worth of rural regions to convince or force local communities into accepting the projects (Franquesa, 2018, 2023).

In this research I draw on these arguments and the recent work of scholar Daniele Conversi (2022) on the relationship between climate policies and nationalism to address the energy transition in Italy as a form of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995) in which resources are **implicitly exploited as national resources**; thus fitting into historical patterns of management of the Sardinian territory as a portion of the national territory. I understand this as a form of “resource nationalism” (Conversi, 2022, p. 88) that targets renewable resources, hence I call it ‘green’ resource nationalism.

I take this as significant for studies of heritage because, as anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2006) argues, any competition for natural resources is also a struggle around culture, provided that the uneven global access to resources engenders ‘cultural distribution conflicts’. Moreover, I understand the functioning of nation-states as continuous reproduction and maintenance of the banal mechanisms of cultural assimilation of the national citizen (Kymlicka and Norman, 2000) that are embedded in every aspect of the machine-state, including the production of energy and the management of natural resources.

3. Methods: Data Gathering and Analysis

For this research, I collected (a) ethnographic data and (b) textual data from selected Sardinian regional media and I analyse them using two methods: Critical Discourse Analysis of the media, and Participant Observation in ethnographic research. I take these data as indicative of the relationship people-place (research aim (i)), the correlation between heritage and ethnic identity (aim (ii)) and the nationalism of state-led land management policies in Sardinia (aim (iii)).

3.1. Methods of Media Data Gathering and Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a qualitative approach to the study of discourse, employed to develop interpretations of the meanings of texts that take into account the social context and power relations in which the text is produced and read (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017). Here I use Fairclough's (1995) model for CDA, as detailed in Richardson's *Analysing newspapers. An approach from Critical Discourse Analysis* (2007). Fairclough's model involves a three-step analysis of the media discourse: of the text (1), and of the discursive (2) and social (3) practices through which the text is constructed. Yet, as my interest is not so much the role of media in either reproducing or resisting social power (which is the focus of CDA) but their heritage discourse as a proxy for the public discourse on heritage and identity, I mostly focus on the step (1), that is, the textual analysis.

I apply the CDA method to textual data from Sardinian media, that I collected over a three-month period (from February 17 to May 8, then from May 22 to 25, 2023) using a keyword-based survey of two main regional daily newspapers: *L'Unione Sarda* and *La Nuova Sardegna*.

Skimming the newspaper issues per day (a total of up to 120 issues), I filtered around 260 and 130 articles from *L'Unione* and *La Nuova* respectively (including advertisements and skylines) containing words related to cultural heritage and identity. Specifically, I searched for the following nouns and adjectives, which during my pilot study I found recurring in the heritage discourse of the media: identity, culture, cultural heritage, Sardinians, (Sardinian) people,

history and civilisation, Nuragic civilisation, ancient, (our) language, (our) territory and land⁹.

I then introduced a second level of filtering by selecting articles on wind turbines only.

I performed this selection through visual scanning alone, as the sources were only available on paper (in Sardinia) or scanned for online viewing for a period of 30 days post-publication, but in a format that was not searchable electronically. The shortcoming of such an approach, where the text is skimmed rather than queried, leaves open the potential for inadvertent omissions which in turn can lead to difficulties in conducting quantitative observations. However these possible omissions did not pose a problem for my research since I was not interested in the frequency or the total number of heritage and identity-related words in the media, but on the discourses developed with and around them.

In my application of discourse analysis I use **hybrid coding**. This means that I read the documents looking for my initial set of categories—the previously singled out heritage- and identity-related words—(deductive coding), and, as I get immersed in the textual data, I revisit and refine these codes by incorporating new themes and concepts as they emerge (inductive coding).

I then develop the textual analysis, from the small-scale level of word choice to the structure of the sentences and the article as a whole. As for discursive practices, that is, the general processes

⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations in English are my own translation from Italian, which is the language of these newspapers.

through which journalists construct the text for a target audience, I focus on linguistic style and intertextuality: in specific, on quotes as providing information on who (and how) the media take as a source for discourse on heritage and identity. This in turn allows for a more informed evaluation of the word choices within the textual analysis (Richardson, 2007).

3.1.1. Why Regional Newspapers?

As regional media, *L'Unione* and *La Nuova* are written by Sardinians for Sardinians. They are read quite evenly across the island, despite a clear preference for *L'Unione* in the capital, Cagliari, and *La Nuova* in Sassari, where these newspapers were first founded (IEM, 2008). Reports indicate that print media continue to be an important source of information for people living in Sardinia, more so than in other Italian regions, despite the global trend of increase in visual and digital media. Furthermore, the circulation of regional newspapers in the island appears to be significantly higher than that of national ones: according to recent data, Sardinians consistently prefer to get their news from *L'Unione* and *La Nuova* rather than from national newspapers (Santoro, 2022) ([Figure 1](#)).

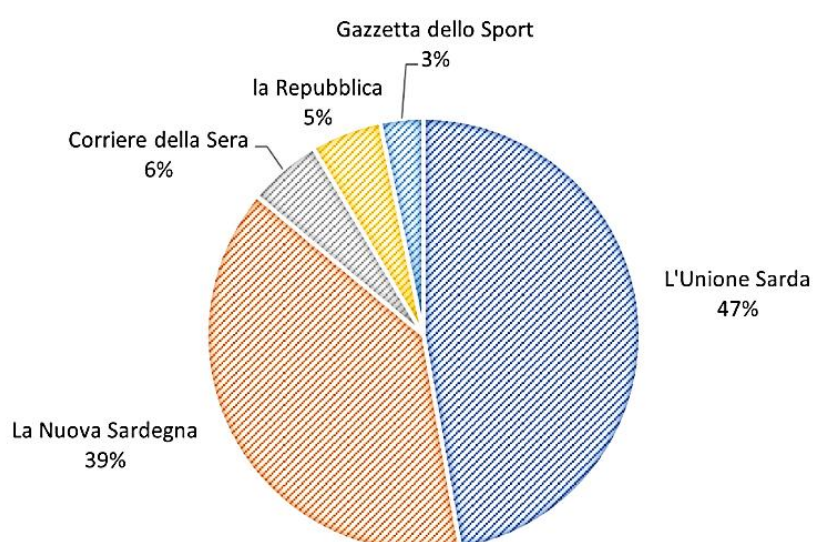


Figure 1. Circulation of regional and national newspapers in Sardinia in 2021. Pie chart derived from ADS (*Aggiornamenti Diffusione Stampa*) and analysis from Data Media Hub (Santoro, 2022).

For my analysis, I draw on the concept of the media as receivers, producers and especially amplifiers of ideas as representatives of local people (Fairclough, 1995; Nielsen, 2019). I consider the heritage discourse of regional newspapers as a proxy for the “knowledge and beliefs” (Richardson, 2007, p. 41) of Sardinian people regarding what constitutes Sardinian heritage and Sardinian identity. I focus on newspapers for their high circulation on the island and because they tend to engage in analysis and commentary (Lorusso and Violi, 2004), which makes them more prone than other media to convey complex values and concepts.

3.2. Ethnographic Data Gathering and Analysis

The analysis of Sardinian media provides only partial insight into the public discourse on heritage and identity. While the media analysis approach is useful to delve into the languages and meanings that are (or are becoming) hegemonic at the regional level, it alone cannot provide an answer to the question of the relationship people-place and its significance for the ethnic identity. To achieve a more nuanced understanding of this topic, I couple the media analysis with ethnographic research in one of the rural villages targeted by wind turbine projects: Villanovaforru, a small inland municipality in central-west Sardinia within the historical subregion of Marmilla.

3.2.1. Why Villanovaforru?

Villanovaforru has become the focus of my research due to the frequency with which it was appearing in the media articles around wind turbines, both for its engagement in current mobilisations against these facilities and because of its history of community-based activism to oppose similar projects in its territory. Furthermore, the village is also at the forefront of

initiatives to implement citizen-driven renewable energy communities¹⁰, being among the first in the island to set up one.

Furthermore, the community is quite small: approximately 622 residents¹¹ but fewer actual inhabitants, as young people tend to leave to study or work elsewhere—a phenomenon that is common and on the rise all throughout Sardinia, especially in inland areas¹². I focused on this village because I thought it suitable for a brief research, as was needed due to time constraints. Specifically, I assumed it would be easier to get involved in the social life of this small community and gain a level of intimacy and familiarity with its members than it would be in a bigger municipality over the same short period of time.

I conducted this research from the viewpoint of an **inside ethnographer**: I myself was born and raised in Sardinia, in a village within a rural area, and I am ethnically Sardinian. The advantages of inside ethnography are manifold (O'Reilly, 2009) and the reason why I chose this method in the first place: as a native, I hold the speech and nonverbal communicative knowledge (linguistically, in both Italian and Sardinian) as well as the cultural competency to avoid causing offence, to blend relatively easily in the community and comprehend nuanced or implicit messages. Furthermore, my proximity to the field increases my accountability as a

¹⁰ For more details on Energy Communities, see the relevant page on the European Commission website (2023).

¹¹ At the 2021 census (Ministero dell'Interno, 2021).

¹² For details on the phenomenon of Sardinian emigration, see the report from CREI (2023).

researcher (Forster, 2012). Specifically as to my research questions, it also allows me to *see* political issues related to the ethno-national cleavage (Pala, 2016) that can be implied in the discourse and easily hidden to an external observer.

However, to reduce potential bias and the societal pressure that might come as negative aspects of inside ethnography, I sought a place that would allow me some level of detachment. Not only is Villanovaforru located at around 2-hour drive away from my home village and the town where I lived as a teenager, but I had never visited it before. This adds to the characteristics that make me an ‘insider-outsider’ to the field (Forster, 2012), in particular my academic training and the many years I lived outside Sardinia.

My fieldwork in Villanovaforru lasted one week, from 4 to 11 June 2023. As to the methods of data collection, my original plan was to conduct semi-structured interviews with selected community members, using questions on their daily life and their emotional attachment to locales as a prompt. However, once I reached the field and began interacting with them, I realised a participant observation approach would fit better.

3.2.2. Why Participant Observation?

As my aim was to access everyday languages and behaviours, I turned to participant observation as an inductive method of data collection that tends to minimise the intrusion of the researcher in the situation under study. Interviews would have required a limited selection of participants and the planning of a specific, separate setting from the usual daily life, which would influence the behaviour of my interviewees.

Furthermore, my research was meant to be open-ended, as I barely had any pre-set assumptions about the results. While I had the media discourse as a reference, I didn’t want to risk projecting

it on people, directing and thus ultimately obscuring their discourses. Only a flexible, inductive approach would allow me such a research (Jorgensen, 1989). I used **spontaneous conversation** with community members as my main source of data; I did not audio-record any of the conversations, as this would jeopardise their spontaneous nature, but wrote fieldnotes at the end of each day or as soon as possible after the event, as Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2001) suggest.

My interlocutors were informed (whether by me or other community members) that I was conducting a research for my dissertation, in specific that I was investigating the impact of wind turbine projects on the relationship between them and the land. I preferred the word ‘land’ (in Italian, *territorio*) over ‘place’ (*luogo*) or ‘landscape’ (*paesaggio*) as grounded in the tangible reality of place and open to the varied nature of that relationship, not limited to the visual appreciation of place that the concept of landscape suggests.

In virtually all cases, knowing my research topic was what sparked a conversation with me in the first place. I stored all data anonymously and occasionally changed the gender of the interlocutor, so that community members would not be identified.

4. Results

4.1. Newspapers: an Overview

My final data for the media analysis consist in **69** articles from *L’Unione Sarda* and **10** from *La Nuova Sardegna*. They can be distinguished between those dealing with recent mobilisations against wind power plants and those giving notice of new projects.

L’Unione devotes much more space than *La Nuova* to such news through strongly opinionated pieces of journalism. Most articles report the opinions of interviewees: local mayors, activists

and members of NGOs or associations; rarely just ordinary people, only subtly or implicitly that of the journalist. Yet, some journalists take a clear stance and openly argue against windfarms in their articles: this is especially true for Mauro Pili, former politician and the most prolific journalist covering these news in *L'Unione*, as well as the one with the most opinionated and pathemic¹³ style.

This is consistent with *L'Unione Sarda's* explicit decision to take a stand against non-community led wind farm projects in Sardinia and call the population to mobilise against them (Scanu, 2023b). This started with an edition on March 13, 2022, whose front page featured a map of Sardinia with all planned and existing wind and solar power plants, titled “S.O.S. Sardinia” (Figure 2). Two articles were also published urging the readers for action, signed by the Publisher and the Editor-in-Chief and titled “The Home of the Sardinian Family. A moral duty: saving the home of all the Sardinians” (Zuncheddu, 2022) and “The spirit of Pratobello. Rediscovering something of Pratobello's pride to say enough is enough” (Dessì, 2022).

¹³ Term used in Italian semiotics to describe a communication that evokes an emotional and affective response in the person who receives and interprets it (Lorusso and Violi, 2004).



Figure 2. Front page of *L'Unione Sarda* 13 March 2022, featuring a map of the existing and planned facilities in Sardinia for energy production for export.

Results are grouped as follows based on the rhetorical and syntactic strategies used by the journalist to represent social actors as well as actions, processes and events in the news text (Richardson, 2007).

4.1.1. Modality and Rhetorical Tropes: Negative Judgements and War Metaphors

La Nuova and *L'Unione* consistently use negative hyperboles, in particular **metaphors of war** to talk about wind turbine projects. This language consists of nouns and verbs that are used by

both journalists and interviewees, directly quoted: ‘conquer’, ‘threaten’, ‘invade’, and similar. Pili uses a number of neologisms to describe windfarms as a type of belligerent initiative: such as “eolic invasion” (or “...assault”, “...venture”, “...ambush”), all from articles published in February (Pili, 2023c, 2023f, 2023a).

This flow of negative action is organically opposed by a consequential reaction revolving around the concept of ‘**defence**’. From a statement by a local mayor: “«This is not a battle, it’s a war for the defence of our territory»” (*L’Unione Sarda*, 2023c). Likewise, an ostensible direct quote from the front page reads: “«We are ready to take the barricades. We will defend our lands from this assault», said farmers, shepherds and municipal administrators” (Pintore, 2023a).

Furthermore, both journalists and interviewees use generally negatively connoted verbs and nouns to express moral judgements on the planned building of windfarms. The complementary use of hyperbolic and non-hyperbolic language is exemplified in sentences as “«We are tired of being considered a land of conquest by corporations that exploit our territory»” (Scanu, 2023), where a war metaphor is used within a political argument.

4.1.2. Transitivity: Actions and Actors

The above results involve what scholars of discourse refer to as “transitivity”, i.e., the ways in which actions are represented (Richardson, 2007, p. 54). Of particular interest are the kind of actions represented, who does them and to whom they are directed. Let’s turn to the description of the type of damage (what-how?), those responsible (who?) and those affected (whom?).

a) Whom? – Who is affected by wind farms?

Transitive negative actions describe physical processes that are directed against the *land*, such as “a race to conquer the peaks” (Muzzu, 2023) and “climbing on Sardinian soil” (Pili, 2023c). In Pili, the tangible reality of the land is evoked with highly emotive and lyrical descriptions or phrases, such as “the land of Sardinia” (Pili, 2023a).

A common rhetorical trope is the **personification** of the land as a subject of the action; an example is “The territory does not surrender” (Gioia, 2023a). The land can also be personified as receiving the action, as in a statement from a mayor arguing that the proliferation of wind farms and cell towers projects indicate “«(...) a sociopathy (...) towards the hills and highlands of the territory»” (Muzzu, 2023).

Personification is not only a figure of speech in journalistic jargon: it is also used consistently by interviewees. Obviously, it actually refers to actions undertaken by those living in the territory. It is thus a metonym as well: a word used in place of another, based on logical relationship between the two—in this case, between the place and its inhabitants.

Concern about damage to the land is manifold. There is preoccupation towards its beauty, described as exceptional through adjectives that stress its speciality: ‘breathtaking’, ‘exclusive’, ‘enchanted’, ‘unique’. This value, appreciated through visual experience, is usually addressed as a value of ‘the **landscape**’. Virtually all articles I singled out on wind turbines that mention heritage and identity include statements from local politicians about the exceptional features of their municipal landscape that would be affected by the presence of these facilities.

Yet damage to the aesthetic value is not the only concern of local politicians, activists and NGOs when it comes to the foreseen presence of windfarms on the land. First of all, **nature** is also frequently mentioned as affected by the projects.

Municipal authorities identify specific features of the environment whose protection would be incompatible with the construction and operation of windfarms: natural resources (in particular water), fragile geological formations, the presence of wildlife (Ardovino, 2023; Pili, 2023g, 2023b; Pintus, 2023b, 2023a) and prime plant species as millennia-old olive trees (Pili, 2023d) or seagrass meadows (Pani, 2023).

Interviewees agree that the negative impact would involve all the territory of Sardinia, beyond the boundaries of each municipality (Muzzu, 2023). Alongside these concerns towards the landscape and the environment, the **people** and specifically local communities also appear to be impacted by the building and operation of windfarms, even though indirectly.

One of the ways is through impact on **archaeological sites** and other **sites of historical and cultural interest**. As quoted from the official statement of a municipal council, the “«*beni identitari*»” are endangered: that is, the (tangible) assets that are of importance for identity as representatives of “«Sardinian culture and tradition»” (Bonu, 2023). When it comes to heritage sites, in particular to archaeological remains from the local Nuragic civilisation¹⁴, their foreseen

¹⁴ Indigenous civilisation of Sardinia, dating from the Bronze to the Roman Age, which left evidence of an advanced society such as thousands of megalithic buildings (Lilliu, 1963).

damage is invariably described as damage to all the Sardinians, never to local villagers only. Exemplary are the articles on the planning of wind turbines around the UNESCO site of Su Nuraxi ([Figure 3](#)), regarded as the best-preserved example of *nuraghe*¹⁵.

Pili describes it as “the primordial Pantheon of Sardinian civilisation”, “symbol of the Civilisation of the Sardinian People”, and argues that building windfarms in its surroundings would mean “to permanently scar the most ancient roots of the Sardinian people” (Pili, 2023a). On the same note, another journalist who signs as ‘Member of Parliament’ writes that “plans for wind plants on the island’s most important archaeological sites” are “a sacrilege” and “a scar to the history of Sardinia” (*L’Unione Sarda*, 2023a).

Last but not least, stakeholders highlight the hindrance or alteration to the “**vocation**” of the territory, by which they mean traditional activities (agriculture and pastoralism) and tourism, that guarantee the livelihood and possibilities for future developments for those living in the place (Gioia, 2023b).

¹⁵ A *nuraghe* is the architectural typology par excellence of the Nuragic civilisation. Su Nuraxi di Barumini is the only World Heritage Site in Sardinia, inscribed in 1997 (ICOMOS, 1997; UNESCO, 2009).

b) What? How? – How would wind farm cause damage?

Verbs used to describe *how* the building of wind turbines would affect the land tend to be quite vague: ‘impact’, ‘disfigure’, ‘compromise’, etc. Other words specify the nature of this perceived damage as a strongly negative **modification** of the land (‘alteration’, ‘disruption’, and similar) which, once happened, cannot be reversed (‘irreparable’, ‘unhealable’).

Specifically, damage to the landscape is described as “visual impact” (Ardovino, 2023). Pili writes that the “gentle hills” of the Marmilla region, around Su Nuraxi, would “lose forever their unique line of horizon” with the presence of wind turbines (Pili, 2023a). A local mayor defines it as a threat to the “«integrity and beauty of the territory»” (Muzzu, 2023).

As regards the environment, its damage is generally associated to that to the landscape as a similar matter of **loss and disruption of integrity**. Interviewees describe the fragilities of each environmental feature, so that the ways these could be damaged by wind turbines come across as intuitive. The possibility that a renewable energy facility as a windfarm could cause environmental harm is expressed as a legitimate concern, which should be addressed by the relevant authorities.

As to the archaeological sites, their damage is treated first and foremost as a matter of alteration of the “archaeological landscape” (Pili, 2023a; *L’Unione Sarda*, 2023b), but destruction of underground remains is also occasionally mentioned.



Figure 3. Pictures published alongside articles on wind plants projects near archaeological sites, from *L'Unione Sarda* 19 February 2023. Above: a photomontage of a turbine near Su Nuraxi.

As regards the change in the uses of the land, this happens through a “widespread industrialisation” that severely **damages the rurality** of the territory and interferes with local economic activities, which are only possible if these areas remain rural (Gioia, 2023a).

Of particular interest here is the choice of a word as ‘industrialisation’, that is associated with ideas of pollution. This idea appears in other articles as well; emblematic is a quote in Sardinian language from a local workman, which the journalist claims sums up the feelings of those protesting against wind turbines: “«[They] Want to spoil the place»” (Pintore, 2023a).

c) “They” Who? – Who is responsible for the damage?

It is energy companies, either Italian or foreign, that develop wind turbine projects to be realised in Sardinia. Some naming strategies used in the newspapers to identify them are particularly effective in conveying negative judgements: in particular, the neologism “lords of the wind”, coined by Pili (2023e) and incorporated in subsequent articles (Pintus, 2023b; Serreli, 2023).

Other, less overt, derogatory descriptions with referential strategies are “gentlemen who came from Padania” (Pili, 2023a), or “businessmen who came from Singapore” (Pili, 2023c), as they highlight their foreignness—that is, their **otherness** from Sardinia. This is expressed by interviewees as well: as when the former mayor of Isili states that “it is a vast speculative operation, by companies that are external and alien to the Sarcidano [the region] and Sardinia” (Gioia, 2023b).

However, this is not where responsibilities end. As Pili puts it: “Don’t call [the energy companies] ruthless, they just try. The real issue is (...) who allows them to” (Pili, 2023b). It is agreed that responsibility lies with those who have the power to regulate, through legislation, the construction of windfarms on the island.

Pili writes that it is “State offices” (Pili, 2023b) and “the direction of Rome” (Pili, 2023g) who are to be blamed as, by failing to impose restrictions, they are complicit (if not planners) of the exploitation of Sardinian territory. He goes as far as to coin the term “Ministry of the eolic invasion” (Pili, 2023a, 2023b), a manifest accusation against the government. Nevertheless, not only the specific (regional or national) government, but the State as an institution and Italy as a whole can as well be perceived as the counterpart.

Criticising the Nation

Criticism towards the Nation comes in different forms, sometimes through implicit claims (so-called presuppositions (Richardson, 2007)), or overtly through direct quotations. Expressions of judgement on the government's treatment of Sardinia can bear criticism to Italy as a whole that is implicit in the description of the island as **serving the (rest of the) country**. This is quite clear when a mayor is quoted saying:

Someone in Rome has decided that while in the central northern regions people must live off industry, manufacturing and agriculture, i.e. the population is and must be increasingly active, Sardinia must become a large energy platform to provide 'innovative' energy for the industries and production of the *already richer regions*. Sardinia is condemned to *a passive role* (...) (Lai, 2023, emphasis added).

Likewise, implicit judgements are expressed with the terms '**colonialism**' and '**servitude**': wind power plants on the island are "colonial projects" (*L'Unione Sarda*, 2023a) or a "«new form of neo-colonisation»" (Sirigu, 2023). Journalist Mariangela Pala on an article on solar plants writes that they "risk turning the Island into an energy colony" (Pala, 2023) and interviewees talk of "imposition of a total energy servitude" (A. Pani, 2023; Scanu, 2023b).

This word choice can also be seen as a form of external intertextuality (Richardson, 2007), through which reference is made to stories other than the subject of the article, which the reader is assumed to know. This is the case when Pili writes that "this story is not the *usual* descent of foreigners to the island of Sardinia, it is not *yet another* invasion of new foreigners" (Pili, 2023c) or "*once again*, in the sea of Sulcis, poor and left with no future, and that of Teulada, devastated by bombs and missiles, an invasion is planned" (Pili, 2023g) (emphasis added).

The most emblematic of the overtly anti-national quotes which also makes use of the same references is a direct quotation from the mayor of Maracalagonis Francesca Fadda:

«Sardinia has suffered a violent depredation. Beginning with military servitudes that produce disease and death»: words that portray a stepmotherly Italy. «The Italian State that has taken away our language and history wants to deprive us of our identity and autonomist soul» (Cocco, 2023).

Reproducing the Nation

Apart from judgments that criticise the government without questioning the nation-state or others that are (implicitly or overtly) against it, of particular interest are the presuppositions and direct quotations that instead convey **nationalistic discourses**.

In these articles, these come almost solely from representatives of the Regional Government, that is, regional politicians. In particular, the Councillor for the Environment Marco Porcu is quoted saying at the 12 April rally against windfarms: “«All regions [of Italy] must contribute to the goal»” (Cossu, 2023) and “«We are aware that Sardinia will be called upon to do its part in the energy transition, in the overall interest of the Nation» (*La Nuova Sardegna*, 2023).

4.2. Ethnography through Participant Observation: a Summary

Villanovaforru is set amidst fertile hills bordering the vast Campidano plain ([Figure 4](#)). To reach it, I crossed Sardinia horizontally through the highlands. This route runs close to several wind power plants constructed in previous decades, some rather large ([Figures 5, 6](#)) and some of the so-called ‘mini’ format of less than 60 KW of power, bordering the road as it approaches the village ([Figures 7, 8](#)), strongly opposed by local people at the time of their construction.



Figure 4. A view of Villanovaforru from one of its highest points.



Figure 5. Wind power plant in the municipality of Ulassai, seen from the highlands.



Figure 6. Wind power plant 'Monte Guzzini' and cell towers in the landscape between the municipalities of Isili and Nurri.



Figure 7. 'Mini-' wind turbines in a private orchard in the municipalities of Villanovaforru, Sanluri and Sardara.



Figure 8. 'Mini-' wind turbine near Villanovaforru, bordering the main road.

The municipal lands of Villanovaforru are interested by four windfarm projects. All these projects extend across the territory of several municipalities, part of it temporarily for the construction of ancillary facilities (foundations, roads, substations, cables...) and some through the aerial space that will be taken up by the blades. Within the territory of the village, the following wind turbines are planned: 3 from Asja Serra S.r.l. (I.A.T. S.r.l., 2023), 1 from Engie Trexenta S.r.l. (SCM Ingegneria S.r.l., 2023c) and 1 from Marte S.r.l.¹⁶.

¹⁶ Documents for this one are still unavailable.

Each turbine will have a tip height of 200 m or above, peaking at 220 m in Asja Serra's project. This would be 4 times as high as the turbines at the entrance to Villanovaforru ([Figures 7, 8](#)) and about twice as high as the local telecommunication antenna ([Figure 9](#)). Underground bases in reinforced concrete are also planned, with a diameter of approximately 25 m and a height of 3 m (I.A.T. S.r.l., 2023a; SCM S.r.l., 2023b).



Figure 9. The approximately 100 m tall telecommunication antenna of Villanovaforru, seen from the village.

As per the intervisibility maps generated for the projects (I.A.T. S.r.l., 2023a; SCM Ingegneria S.r.l., 2023a), wind turbines would be visible from inside the village, and from the Nuragic site

of Genn'e Mari that is located in the heights above. Many of the turbines in the surrounding area, whether built in municipal lands or not, will be visible from the countryside as well.

At the time of my fieldwork, Asja Serra S.r.l. had published a list of the land to be expropriated, including the names of its private owners. All of it is pastoral or agricultural land, with vineyards and olive groves (I.A.T. S.r.l., 2023b); potentially, companies could appeal to the public utility and obtain it through expropriation in case the landlord refused to sell. When I arrived in Villanovaforru the topic was fresh and very sensitive, and people were eager to engage in conversation about it.

I talked with around 30 villagers and had brief interactions with more people, some of them visitors and tourists, during my stay in Villanovaforru. For reasons of space, here I will only describe the most significant results based on my fieldnote, and discuss them in the following chapter.

4.2.1. Participant Observation

(V) and (U)

One of my first conversations is with two men who want to know what I am researching specifically. To my reply that I want to understand how wind turbines damage the relationship local people have with the land, (V) comments: “But what do you expect them [the villagers] to answer?” and (U) chimes: “We don’t want to see them [the turbines] at all!”.

He tells me that, if he had to chose aesthetically between cell towers and turbines, he would choose the latter; the problem is that they are a “speculation”, with no benefits for local people as the energy would be entirely exported. This is also the first time I hear about the problem of

noise. (U) says that the sound of the blades can be heard two kilometres away. (V) comments: “It gets into your house”.

I ask if they think wind turbines cause damage to the land. (V) replies: “I’ll take you to see the Church of Sant’Antiògu and *you* tell me if they damage it or not”.

The Church of Sant’Antiògu Becciu

Several villagers mention this church as an example of severe damage caused by windfarms in a place of cultural significance. They tell me this 17-century building was in ruins and was rebuilt in 2019 through entirely bottom-up initiative. Despite being located in the nearby municipality of Sanluri, “we feel it is *ours*”, an elderly lady tells me while her husband nods.

Between 2013 and 2014, several mini-wind turbines were built around the church’s ruins as the land was sold through private agreement between the owner and the energy company, despite opposition from the community. Ms (T), one of the few people I have spoken with who will be keen to sell her land, tells me these were unfertile lands, only used for pasture.

I visit the church on a windy day, and then again on a sunny morning. The presence of the turbines so close to the building is impressive despite the fact that they do not exceed 30 metres in height, and is increased with the wind as they produce a constant, penetrating sound (Figure 10).



Figure 10. The Church of Sant'Antiògu Becciu in Sanluri, with four of the wind turbines visible.



Figure 11. Close-up on the church side, with other turbines and the Villanovaforru 'antenna' visible in the background.

(Z)

When I ask 70-year-old (Z) if he thinks that wind farms could be a problem for the relationship between people and land, he shrugs and says: “There is no longer that affective relationship with the land that there used to be”.

On what he thinks of wind power plants, whether they are beautiful or ugly, he tells me that sometimes the turbines “keep him company” when he travels and that it is not important if they are beautiful or not: “it is like when a person looks in the mirror” he says, “maybe she’s ugly, but it doesn’t matter”. On the aesthetic aspect, he also notices that the turbines currently operating on the island are from an older generation while the new “spiral wind turbines” he has seen abroad are quiet and less impactful (he says, “they are beautiful”). Yet, he is strongly against windfarms that are currently planned in the surrounding area and the rest of Sardinia: “If they expropriate my land, I will knock the wind turbine down” he says – On principle? – “On principle”.

(Y)

(Y) has a vineyard above which a wind turbine is planned. He tells me about the conversation he had with a technician from the energy company that approached him to give him notice of the project. Faced with his opposition, the technician said: “But how much time do you spend in the vineyard?”. (Y) felt this as a very intrusive question, which was meant to judge him implicitly on the value he places on the land based on the time he spends in it. “Can you imagine? How dare you?” he says.

(X) and (W)

(X) and (W) are winemakers and our conversation starts as they compliment me on the good quality of the wine that is made in my village. They are proud of their job: they offer me a home-made typical wine and they show me pictures of their vineyards. They tell me that the tradition of wine-making is ancient in this region and that archaeological research demonstrates that the technology was not introduced by Phoenicians but developed autonomously in Sardinia.

(X) shows me the magazines he keeps on the archaeological site of Genn'e Mari and the local Church of Santa Maria and suggests I read them. He also urges me to visit these sites in person, as well as the recently excavated Nuraghe Pinn'e Maiolu and the local amphitheatre.

(S)

Several people use the word *deturpare* ('disfigure') to describe the damage caused by wind turbines. Rather than with the landscape, they associate it mostly with the environment and the land, or its beauty. However, an unexpected description of the damage is given to me by an elderly man, Mr. (S). He tells me that "the turbines disfigure", full stop; when I ask him how, he replies, "When you are working in the countryside, you hear this very loud sound all the time... It drives you mad!"

Mr. (S) still personally cultivates his land (or part of it), as is common among elders in Sardinian rural villages. He is happy and proud to have lived in Villanovaforru "all his life", despite having travelled a lot. When I ask him if he likes the village, he replies by describing how fertile are the lands, and the types of crops there are. Likewise, when I tell him where I am from, he says that he "likes" my village because of its vineyards and other cultivations in its lands.

(R)

As many of the people I have spoken with, (R) is in the list by Asja Serra S.r.l. of the landlords to be expropriated. She has a permanent job but considers it a “hobby” because she is always very busy tending her land.

“My sisters left me the land because they said: you will never have the courage to sell. [Now] To find your name like that in the list of the land to be expropriated...” her voice breaks and she stops. “Where dad planted the olive trees!? Where he planted the vines!? What do they [the energy companies] have to do with my land? Raze everything to build roads and then give it back to me destroyed?” she adds, “But do you know how damaging it is to lose certain crops?”.

She tells me: “You go to the countryside to hear the sounds of nature, to see animals, foxes, hares... It's nice. That's how I grew up”; the windfarms will change that.

5. Discussions

The above results provide significant data for my research question on the role of heritage in the conflict between Sardinian and Italian identity as emerging around disputes over wind energy projects. In this chapter, I will interpret these findings to fulfil my research aims. Each aim involves the demonstration of an underlying argument, which builds upon the previous one:

- For aim (i), I argue that the **land and landscape are forms of cultural heritage** for people based in the rural villages of Sardinia (see Appendix, Table 1).
- For aim (ii), I argue that the land and landscape, as heritage, **maintain and ignite** feelings of belonging to the ethnic group—that is, **Sardinian identity**—which in turn informed the needs for protection and claims for ownership of the land and landscape in the first place (see Appendix, Table 2).
- For aim (iii), I argue that the proliferation of renewable energy projects in Sardinia is expression of a covert Italian nationalism: in specific, that land management policies are a form of **use of heritage** that works to **maintain and reproduce the nation-state daily** (see Appendix, Table 3).

In the Conclusions chapter, I will then suggest a final research answer in light of these arguments that I will now move on to demonstrate.

5.1. The land and landscape of Sardinia as local people's heritage

The results of this research point to a strong heritage significance of the land and landscape for people inhabiting villages in the rural areas of Sardinia that are currently targeted by windfarm projects. The metaphors of war used by both journalists and community representatives in the newspapers convey the strength of the negative emotions that are triggered by the anticipated

presence of these facilities. The choice of verbs and nouns that evoke violence reflect real, intense feelings of threat, injustice and urgency to (re)act.

The recognition of such ‘affective responses’ has been argued as crucial for a thorough understanding of situations of conflict (see the concept of hot interpretation (Uzzell, 1989)). Local people feel they are **stewards** of the land, acting in its defence. This is condensed in a quote from the president of Fondazione Barumini, that manages the site of Su Nuraxi: “«The only interest to be pursued must be to defend the land, the landscape and the artistic and cultural heritage that has been bequeathed to us for millennia and which we have a duty to preserve for future generations»” (Scanu, 2023b).

This responsibility to preserve what is inherited is coupled with a sense of **conflation of people and place** that is vehiculated through the frequent use of personifications to talk about the land. On this note, the use of the word “sociopathy” (Muzzu, 2023) is significant, particularly because it describes a pathological relationship with the land as a form of social disorder, where the land is thus, to all intents and purposes, participant in the human community.

Similar judgements regarding what constitutes a healthy or unhealthy relationship with the land were expressed in some of the assemblies I attended during the fieldwork: exhortations like “we *must feel* that the countryside belongs to all” or the idea that “the disaffection for the territory, the not feeling” is a “really, really bad” thing. Even Mr (Z)’s comment (see section 4.2.2.) on the lack of affective bonds between people and the land conveys a judgement, even though not necessarily negative, of a loss rather than a mere change that was recently experienced by these communities in their relationship with the land.

While the media discourse tends to locate the value of the land and landscape in their **exceptionality**, it also incidentally points to their heritage significance beyond such hegemonically-defined ‘heritage values’ as beauty, monumentality, antiquity and rarity (Smith, 2006). Specifically, it is life-in-the-place that is denounced as affected by wind turbines through the **physical change to the rurality of the land**. In local’s people concerns, the presence of windfarms (in all stages of their existence, from their construction and operation to their eventual dismantling) not only alters but **threatens life-in-the-place**, that is, its continuation in the future. In the words of a farmer: “«We cannot have our lands stolen. We risk leaving nothing to the young. This does not stop depopulation»” (Pintore, 2023a).

While this could be understood as an economic matter that has to do with livelihood rather than with heritage, yet both the media discourse and the accounts of people from Villanovaforru show it is fallacious to separate the economic from the cultural aspect of the experience of living-in-the-place. The frequent use of the word “vocation” in the newspapers to describe the characteristics of the land that make it prone to agriculture, herding and sustainable tourism implies a natural inclination of the land to those uses.

For the traditional activities of farming and pastoralism, this is reinforced by their historical continuity and has strong implications for the local identity. As in a quote from a mayor, “«We do not surrender to those who would have us *no longer be shepherds*, but guardians of wind turbines»” (Lai, 2023, emphasis added). Of course, the strength of this identity varies from village to village and is also dictated by the characteristics of the territory; Villanovaforru, for example, is a village “of farmers rather than shepherds”, as I was told.

It follows that wind power plants in these rural areas forcefully **disrupt the historical continuity in land-use choices** for local people. Both the traditional activities and the land in

(and through which) these are conducted are experienced by locals in ways that fall within academic definitions of ‘heritage’, particularly that of ‘selective memory’: that is, conscious choices that are continuously made by individuals or groups regarding what to remember and forget about their past—as in the reference works of Smith (2006), Lowenthal (1985, 1998) and Assmann (2009).

The inhabitants of villages in rural Sardinia feel that their traditional occupations as shepherds and farmers are still *current*. They need to be maintained and coupled with other uses of the land, provided they suit and preserve its most valued characteristics—notably, scenic beauty and pristineness. Not only is this a claim for **continuity of life in the place**, but also for deciding one’s own future: that which anthropologist Tracey Heatherington in her study of the opposition to a national park in the village of Orgosolo called “the life projects of the Sardinians” (Heatherington, 2010, p. 8).

As suggested in Stedman (2003), the physical reality of place “sets bounds and gives form” (p. 671) to the social constructions and meanings attributed to settings that contribute to building attachment to locales and, more generally, a ‘sense of place’. Ethnographic research shows the many ways in which the change in the physicality of place caused by wind farms affects life-in-the-place, even when it doesn’t imply a loss of owned land or the abandonment of rural activities for some of its inhabitants.

In the case of Mr (S), tending his land is an important part of his wellbeing in his life in Villanovaforru. The value he places on the land is based on its fertility and how this is valorised by those who cultivate it, producing flourishing crops; yet this is not for reasons of utility only. How **affective** the experience of cultivating is for this elderly man can be read in his sentence that “Growing a plant is like raising a child”.

His concerns about wind farms are mainly about their noise, which reaches and distresses him when he is out in the countryside. It appears that the sound of the turbines *enters* his relationship of daily life with the land, where being-in-the-place and tending the plants takes place in an intimately affective way, thereby altering it.

In Tuan (1975), ‘sense of place’ is generally developed through manifold subconscious perceptions, as *feelings* that accrete through time and are “omnipresent” (p. 161). In this case, it is a **dramatic change in these perceptions** that affects the sense of place, or the experience of place as a crucial aspect of life. For Mr (S), the change is both an addition (as a distressing noise) and a loss (the impossibility to enjoy the rural sounds that are familiar and cherished). This can also be seen as a change in the body-ballet, that is, the automatised routines performed in the place that produce attachment to it (as in Seamon (1980)), provided that the changes in the perception of place **push the body to act differently—and to *stay* differently** (or not to stay at all, as I will suggest) **in the place**.

A similar process is recounted by (R), whose concerns towards losing “the sounds of nature” and the encounters with wild animals in the countryside manifest fears of loss of the *experience* of the pristine land. The focus of her narrative are memories: those of past experiences of life-in-the-place, which are cherished and preserved.

In her capacity as a landowner, she is affected by temporary expropriation only (for the building of supporting infrastructures), thus will not permanently lose access to the land or the possibility to decide over its uses. However, she is likely to suffer damage to her crops and other disturbances: this is an alteration of the places where her **cherished memories** are not only “remembered through contemporary interactions (and) performances” (as per Smith (2006, p. 77)) but **embodied in the physical features of the land** themselves. In her words: “Where dad

planted the olive trees!? Where he planted the vines!?”). What happens to those olive trees and vines cannot possibly be but seen as a matter of individual heritage, impacting on this person as well.

It is clear then that the relationship with the land is felt as a **private matter**, one that is experienced in a multitude of ways which, as Lowenthal (1961) suggested, involve the 5 senses as well as memory, feelings, beliefs and rational thoughts. In the words of a farmer quoted in the media, “«The land can have affective value, some things cannot be sold, I grew up there and they belonged to my ancestors. I will never sell»” (Scanu, 2023a).

The sense of offence of (Y) at being inquired about the time he spends at his family’s vineyard reflects the intimacy of the relationship he was questioned on. This adds up to the fact that young people like him are increasingly forced to relocate from rural Sardinia due to poor socio-economic prospects: to stay and take up traditional activities is a not easy option, but, on the other hand, to leave or not to tend to (in this case) the land that was bequeathed to them can be lived with feelings of guilt. All such elements are at play when representatives of wind energy companies approach him and suggest his land is *valueless* to him—in the words of Siamanta (2019), “underutilised and vacant” (p. 277).

Franquesa (2018, 2023) argues this is a common strategy for renewable energy companies targeting already marginal and disenfranchised rural areas: he describes it as a ‘devaluation’ of the territory and the practices that take place in it, where sustainable energy facilities are presented as the importers of new values to an otherwise ‘waste’ land. As to these observations, power plants appear to be working to **drive people away from the countryside** through alteration of their interactions with place that are familiar and significant to them.

5.2. From the local to the ethnic identity

Marking the peak of mobilisations (and media coverage), on 12 April a tractor parade was held in the municipality of Barumini to protest against the planned building of wind turbines around Su Nuraxi and the proliferation of such projects all across Sardinia. The tractor opening the parade whose picture and video were published in the media ([Figure 12](#)) was adorned with four Sardinian flags (so-called ‘Four Mores’), two at the front and two at the rear, and a large frontal sign reading ‘NO TO THE EXPROPRIATION OF THE SARDINIAN LAND’. The other tractors paraded with the yellow flag of farmers’ organisation Coldiretti and the Four Mores, as well. No tractor whatsoever was displayed in the newspapers (nor in online articles) parading with the Italian flag.



Figure 22. Photo of the 12 April rally in Barumini, from *L'Unione Sarda* (Pintore, 2023).

A similar but explicit choice to reject symbols of Italian-ness is when mayors occasionally refuse to wear the tricolour sash; notably, the mayor of Villanovaforru Maurizio Onnis who at the same rally is quoted in the newspapers saying that “«The State is [our] opponent. We must

stop behaving as loyal and acquiescent servants»” under the headline “No tricolour sash” (Pintore, 2023b). However, this is not always the case, as mayors also choose to wear the tricolour during protests so that their institutional role is emphasised—thus, *within* the political framework of the Nation. This could go hand in hand with the use of symbols of Sardinian-ness, as in the article “Mayors lined up to defend the nuraghi” (Gioia, 2023c) where more than 20 mayors pose in front of a nuraghe, most of them wearing the sash.

While attitudes towards Italy are contradictory, what is prominent in the discourses of this protest that filter through and are constructed in the media is the centrality of Sardinian-ness in the activists’ claims. These mobilisation appear to be perceived as **struggles for Sardinian identity**.

Through naming and referential strategies, but especially via the choice of verbs and nouns to describe actions, the media express clear value judgements as they depict opponents (local people and wind energy companies) in a “squared relationship” (Richardson, 2007, p. 51). While this ‘square’ is considered a common pattern of in- and out-grouping, where insiders are positive and outsiders are negative (van Dijk, 1998), in this case the Sardinians are not described as positive because they are insiders but because of the actions they undertake *as insiders*, in virtue of their relationship with place.

Not only are other Sardinians (notably, regional politicians) criticised for their lack of action as aggravated by their apparent unwillingness to use their power, but journalists and interviewees frequently express exhortations to the Sardinians altogether; to the extent that the whole discourse of the media appears as a persuasive speech for the Sardinian reader. In this, the **ethnic identity** is taken as a *reason to act* in defence of the land.

One might pinpoint three different types of concerns for the land: *aesthetic* (characterised as landscape concern), *environmental* and *cultural* (or archaeological). The impact of wind turbines on these values is described as involving all the territory of Sardinia and the Sardinian people as a whole; sometimes specifically as a damage to Sardinian culture and identity. But how does the leap from the small level of the local land and identity to the regional level and the ethnic identity occur?

Based in particular on the discourse of the media, I argue that **the land's characteristics that are valued at the local level** are concurrently perceived as *typical* of the land and landscape of Sardinia, and thus not separable from one another. That is, those characteristics are experienced, preserved and passed on at the level of local life, but at once **conceptualised** (Tuan, 1975) as **shared all throughout Sardinia** and also valued as such. These features of the land thus have two levels of significance: one for the local and another one for the ethnic (Sardinian) identity.

This is not very visible when it comes to the natural environment, which is perceived (and described) as pristine throughout the island but whose features are listed according to the locale. Nevertheless, data—both the media discourse and that of some Villanovaforru villagers—demonstrate that concerns for the landscape *include* nature as a constitutive element of the beauty and speciality of the Sardinian land.

Likewise, the rural territory of Sardinia is also perceived as archaeological, as epitomised by the use of the term “archaeological landscape” in the media. This conveys a sense of heritage significance that does not end at the boundaries of a particular ‘site’ but extends to the land as a whole. The extent of the archaeological presence in Sardinia is something that other authors have already explored, given how imposing the remains of the past—particularly pre and proto-

historic—are in the island’s landscape (Vanzetti, 2021). In the words of Cossu (2007), “in Sardinia, one relates to prehistory primarily through the landscape” (p. 120).

I thus argue that the Sardinian land is valued by its inhabitants for being **pristine and antique at once**; while these characteristics might seem at odds, they are not felt as such (Corona, 2023). Even in the case of agricultural landscapes, clearly modified by human presence, their pristineness lies in their rurality, testimony of the historical coexistence of human activities and natural environment. But how is this related to the ethnic identity?

The many articles written by Mauro Pili are crystal-clear on this issue. First and foremost, he describes damage to the archaeological sites as a damage to the history of the Sardinian people as well. This correlation is not as obvious as it might appear: it was not until the publication of “The Civilisation of the Sardinians” by archaeologist Giovanni Lilliu (1963), that the Pre- and Proto-historic people of Sardinia began to be considered ancestors of present-day islanders and theirs as the history of the Sardinian people, suspended with the arrival of the Romans (first of a long series of ‘colonisers’).

Pili also writes that wind farms would alter “the Nuragic archaeological landscape”, especially that of the Su Nuraxi that he describes as the epitome of Sardinian civilisation. In his view, the discovery and unearthing of the nuraghe in the 1950s *restored* the land as it would have been in Nuragic times: this means that both the “wind and the sun” and “that landscape shaped by sinuous waves of barley and fava beans” are the same now as they were 3,500 years ago (Pili, 2023a). This narrative where nature and ancient buildings are valued together sums up the aforementioned idea of the rural landscape of Sardinia as ‘pristine and antique’: preserved unspoilt through time in its Bronze and Iron Age appearance.

The words of (X) and (W) as well as those of other interviewees in the media show that the continuity of human activity in Sardinia from the Nuragic epoch is felt as a reality, whose maintenance guarantees future life in the land for the Sardinian people. Even during fieldwork, people from Villanovaforru often incorporated archaeology in their discourses on the value of their land and urged me to visit specific sites as important for the history of the village.

At the same time, the land is felt as proving and *guarding* this **historical continuity of life-in-the-place** that is first and foremost the life **of the Sardinian people**. In the words of a mayor, the landscape is “«a treasure chest that preserves *our* memory and *our* history»” (Gioia, 2023, emphasis added), not the memory and history of others.

5.3. Spotting Italian nationalism through the ethno-national conflict

While to embrace Sardinian identity does not necessarily imply adopting a critical attitude towards the state (let alone openly anti-national stances), expressions of discontent with Italy’s treatment of Sardinia are nevertheless central in the media discourse and recur in the words of local people as well. I focus on these discourses—that is, on the experiences of the Sardinians—to uncover the “banal nationalism” (Billig, 1995) of Italy that otherwise tends not to be perceived by external observers.

Particularly relevant on this regard is the **equation of wind farm projects with previous experiences of disenfranchisement and exploitation** of the Sardinian land. These historical experiences need not to be detailed when mentioned in the media: the reader is supposed to know them.

When Pili writes that another “invasion” is planned in the sea of Teulada that is already “devastated by bombs and missiles” (Pili, 2023g) he is referring to military bases, established

by the State on the island, used by NATO for military operations and historically opposed by local people. This situation whereby Sardinia houses 65% of all Italian military bases (Bellotti, 2023) is known in the public discourse as ‘military servitude’. When journalists write that wind power plants are forms of “energy *servitude*” (A. Pani, 2023; Scanu, 2023b), the word resonates with this well-known historical experience of disenfranchisement.

Likewise, parallels are drawn with other episodes of **state-led exploitation of regional resources**: such as the highly polluting oil refinery Saras, “colonising the Gulf of the Angels with its smokestacks and stills” (Pili, 2023g), promoted in the 1960s by the then government within projects to industrialise the island (Cossu, 2021); or the mass deforestation that was carried out in the late 19 century under the Lombard Savoy dynasty (Caterini, 2013).

As a Sardinian, the reader is familiar with descriptions made of such events as colonial enterprises, in which foreigners (non-Sardinians), whether before or after the unification of Italy, became responsible for the alteration of the land while exploiting its resources. These discourses apparently fall within Assmann’s (2009) definition of political memory: one that is not passed on by those who experienced it, but mediated through narratives, rites and relics. However, this is not, as she describes it, a “top-down” process of narrative construction—that is, carried out by “institutions, states and nations [that use and abuse it] for political action” (p. 215)—but is developed from the bottom-up.

It is embraced by the Sardinians¹⁷ based on a **social memory of disenfranchisement**; memory that is actually rarely acknowledged by regional institutions. The target audience of the media discourse is thus a community of knowledge and experience for which it makes perfect sense to equate their present condition of socio-political marginality with past historical events narrated as histories of oppression, as shown in this chapter.

These historical events are equated as episodes of extraction of resources from Sardinia to be consumed elsewhere, which resulted in the **impoverishment of local populations**. In the words of a columnist, “[Renewable energy projects] are a strong recall of what happened to the forests of Sardinia, transformed into sleepers for the construction of the national railways (...) and into coal for the energy needs of others” (Ruiu, 2023). This impoverishment often happens through the collateral loss of other resources than those exploited. For example, in the case of military bases, the island is used for its strategic location and low population density, but these characteristics aren’t resources to be extracted; yet something *is* indeed lost with the occupation and pollution of the place due to military exercises.

In Sardinia, military bases, deforestation, heavy industries and... renewable energy facilities have in common a **collateral damage to the land**, particularly **the features that are of**

¹⁷ The mechanisms of this bottom-up production of narratives of continuity of oppression in Sardinia are partially investigated in Frongia (2007), Cossu (2012) and Vanzetti (2021).

heritage value for both the local and the ethnic identity. This is what Escobar (2006) describes as a problem of ‘cultural distribution’: the powerlessness of some cultures, consequence of an unequal distribution of resources, causes the “cultural processes that are at the basis of [some] people’s valuation and relationship to the natural world” to be marginalised while assimilated into the dominant culture (p. 9).

This is where the **nationalism of the State**—in its “**banal**” form, that is, its everyday ordinary “flagging” (Billig, 1995)—becomes visible, considering that the current wave of renewable energy projects is consequence of national land management policies through which the energy transition agenda is implemented. As already suggested, the unequal access to resources partially works to the profit of the State, which manages them as ‘national’ resources (Conversi, 2022). If we start from the premise that the land and landscape are forms of heritage, the struggle of Sardinian people for the right to manage them is indeed a **cultural distribution conflict** (Escobar, 2006), since their management ultimately lies with the State.

Here Italian banal nationalism lies first of all in the **consideration** (and management) **of the Sardinian territory as national territory**, with consequent expectations of national solidarity and loyalty from its inhabitants. Billig (1995) suggests these common-sense nationalistic assumptions are found especially in the statements of politicians; the Councillor for the Environment is a clear source for this (emblematic when he said that “«Sardinia [must] do its part (...) in the overall interest of the Nation»” (see section 4.1.)). When it comes to regional institutions, they maintain a contradictory attitude as they are caught between pressures to act on behalf of the Sardinians and their responsibilities as an organ on the State; as well as loyalty to the national parties of the centre-right coalition with which the Regional Government is sided.

As previously mentioned (see section 2.3.), recent scholarly work (in particular Franquesa (2018) and Dunlap (2018)) indicates that non-community led renewable energy projects perpetuate the same exploitative logics that are historically associated with non-renewable resources. This happens within the framework of the Nation, as nation-states continue to be the geo-political reality in which we live and in whose framework energy transition plans are implemented (Conversi, 2022). The nationalism behind such renewable energy projects has not yet been addressed in the literature, except when they serve dramatic policies for national sovereignty (Aronczyk, 2023); what Billig (1995) calls ‘hot’ varieties of nationalism. Nevertheless, since nation-states are continuously perpetuated through banal mechanism, I argue that the energy transition must be understood as happening within those daily, common-sense mechanisms as well.

This is apparent in specific narratives that support renewable energy projects, such as **the idea that there is such a thing as an ‘overall interest of the Nation’** to which local communities must submit and which at the same time includes them. Furthermore, state initiative is crucial in shaping how green policies are implemented. As highlighted in Sardinian media, even though there is a gain on the part of energy companies, these need the help of the state to carry out their projects: they need persuasion campaigns to convince local people, or to be forced upon them via specific measures (such as for public utility). Last but not least, renewable energy projects might be incorporated in the national agenda because they serve to bolster the country’s energy sovereignty, not only to meet global environmental standards (Franquesa, 2023).

6. Conclusions

In this final chapter, I present an answer to my research question:

What is the role of heritage in the conflict between Sardinian identity and Italian national identity as emerging around recent disputes over wind farm projects on the island?

First and foremost, as to my previous arguments, the results of this research show that Sardinian rural land has indeed **heritage value** for those living in it, even when it is not referred to as such. The complex relationships between people and territory are definitely based on *feeling*, developed through the experience of living-in-the-place, as observed during the ethnographic research. Even if the affective attachment to place experienced at the level of the individual rarely appears in the media discourse, the frequent statements on the value of the land based on its exceptional features substantiate claims from local people for the **self-construction of their lives** through the activities they consider fit to preserve those values.

The land is experienced at the local level, but conceptualised at the regional. People have a clear picture in their minds of what constitutes Sardinian land and landscape (that is, what is shared throughout all Sardinia and what they perceive as emblematic of the Sardinian land and landscape). Likewise, they have clear ideas on what, of their local experience of life, is to be preserved and transmitted as characteristic of their identity *as Sardinians*.

The mobilisation against wind turbines is experienced as a **struggle for Sardinian identity** that is rooted in the traditional activities that are conducted in the land, whose continuation in the future is guaranteed by its rurality. The concept of identity is fully incorporated in the language Sardinian people use to talk about themselves and consciously used in their claims. Central to

this identity is the continuity of life in the place, visible in both the perceived pristineness of the land and the presence of archaeological remains that are testimony to the alleged historical coexistence of local people and the island's natural environment. For this reason, I argue that Sardinians perceive and value **the land as a repository of their ethno-national identity**.

Hence, the interests of the nation-state regarding the use of the land are intrinsically in contrast with those of the Sardinians. Specifically, I argue that the land and landscape as resources of economic and cultural value for local communities are *taken away* from them in the process of being managed as national properties. In Sardinia, the Italian energy transition agenda reproduces longstanding **oppressive nationalistic practices** that are incorporated in the collective memory of local people and impact on the features and assets that are of significance for the ethnic identity.

As regards the research question, this demonstrates that **Italian nationalism is experienced as a damage to the cultural heritage that is crucial for the ethnic identity**. This happens in the case-study I have chosen but it also shows up as a historical constant in the attitudes of national institutions towards the land as a form of heritage for the Sardinian people. The role of heritage in the conflict between the ethnic and the national identity is thus that of maintaining **Sardinian identity as an identity of the oppressed** that is reinforced every time intense negative feelings are generated when heritage is felt under yet another attack from Italian national institutions.

7. Research Limitations and Wider Significance

This is a preliminary study on a complex issue that is barely addressed in the literature and never with a holistic approach. It comes without saying that it will require further, articulated research. Studies on the relationship between cultural heritage and Sardinian identity are very

few and either focus on archaeological heritage only (Cossu, 2007; Vanzetti, 2021) or discuss the uses of heritage to *construct* identity (Frongia, 2012), rather than taking it as a matter of feeling and experiencing, as well.

In this research I have attempted to address the relationship between heritage and identity in Sardinia from a Heritage studies perspective, that is, based on a broad understanding of heritage as all that humans (consciously or unconsciously) select from the past as significant for their present and future. This is why I have chosen a case-study that apparently has nothing to do with cultural heritage, as the construction and operation of renewable energy projects in the island and the local opposition to it. I am confident this brief research demonstrates what has always been obvious to me as a Sardinian, that is, that the land is a crucial part of what is felt as ‘Sardinian heritage’ and contributes significantly to the development and maintenance of a sense of Sardinian identity.

I have constructed this research so that it has broader significance for studies of ethnic conflicts within nation-states: in specific, to contribute to the understanding of ethnic identities by acknowledging the centrality of the experience of life-in-the-place for their development, rather than dismissing them as constructed. I am aware that having taken ethnic identity and nationalism into consideration might have resulted in an oversaturated research where some concepts are only briefly touched rather than investigated in detail. Nevertheless, neither Sardinian ethnic identity nor the nationalism of the Italian state are mere additions to the study of heritage in Sardinia. In my view, there is no true understanding of Sardinian heritage that does not take into account the conflict between the ethnic and the national identity, as this conflict and the contradictions around it are embedded in the public understanding of heritage and identity, as well as in the management of cultural heritage assets in the island.

Overlooking the ethno-national conflict also means failing to understand the claims of local people on heritage, the narratives they produce around it and the uses they make of it; and ultimately dismissing them as malicious forms of manipulation of heritage. Furthermore, an understanding of the relationship between local people and the land as matters of heritage and identity adds to recent studies on non-community led renewable energy projects as forms of environmental injustice: in specific, it contributes to the acknowledgement of the cultural impact of these projects, as well as their use in maintaining and reproducing nationalism and the nation-state system the world over.

Appendix

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>MAIN ARGUMENT (i)</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The land and landscape are forms of cultural heritage for Sardinians inhabiting small villages in rural areas.</p>		
RESULTS		DISCUSSION
Newspapers	Ethnography	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metaphors of war: narratives of attack and defence. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong emotional involvement with the land.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of stewardship towards the land (preserving and passing on what is bequeathed): responsibility towards future generations as well as the ancestors.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personification of the land and metonym (people as the land). 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong sense of continuity people-place.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expression of judgements regarding a correct, healthy relationship with the land. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consciousness of affective bonds with place and fear of the consequences of their alteration and loss.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentioning of exceptional (a) landscapes and (b) natural and (c) archaeological features of the land as the ones that are threatened by wind turbines and need to be protected from them. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The value of the land and landscape lies in their exceptionality</u>: scenic beauty, pristine environment and unique sites of archaeological (historical) and cultural significance. These features demonstrate the significance of the place and the need for its preservation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentioning of traditional activities (farming and herding) on which local 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The value of the land lies in its use</u>, in specific, its role to sustain livelihood.

<p>communities count for their future in-the-place (together with tourism) as threatened by the loss in the rurality of the land caused by wind farm projects.</p> <p>• Identity claims on traditional activities (in particular herding).</p>	<p>• The value of the land also lies in the <u>continuity of life in the place</u> that is demonstrated and maintained through the persistence of historically traditional activities in it.</p> <p>• The disruptions to local attempts to preserve and enhance activities that are perceived as fit for the rural Sardinia setting are described as threats to life-in-the-place as they hinder the possibility to make the land a future source of livelihood (“life projects” (Heatherington, 2010)).</p> <p>• The land and the activities conducted in it are valued by local people through processes of selective memory (Lowenthal, 1985, 1998; Smith, 2006; Assmann, 2009).</p>
<p>• Very rare discourses on the individual affective attachment to places as giving value to the land.</p>	<p>• (Mr. (S))</p> <p>The value of the land lies in its cultivation. Growing a plant is an affective experience (like “raising a child”). The noise of the wind turbines “drives you mad”.</p> <p>• (Ms. (R))</p> <p>The significance of the land lies in the experiences of pristine</p> <p>• The experience of life-in-the-land and the activities conducted daily in it (body-ballet (Seamon, 1980)) can be deeply affective. <u>The value of the land also lies in this affectivity.</u></p> <p>• Change to the physicality of place (Stedman, 2003) caused by wind farms affects in many ways life-in-the-place and the local people’s ‘sense of place’.</p> <p>(a) By altering the experience of life-in-the-land through a change in perception (Tuan, 1975).</p> <p>(b) By pushing the body to act/stay differently in the place (change in the body-ballet (Seamon, 1980)).</p>

	<p>nature it provides, the tangible value of its crops, and the memories it bears.</p> <p>Wind turbines produce damage in that they cause loss of all these values.</p> <p>• (Ms. (Y))</p> <p>The inquiry about the time he spends in his land on the part of representatives of renewable energy companies is felt as a grave offence. It was also an attempt to convince him of the positive impact of the wind turbines.</p>	<p>(c) By altering the places in which cherished memories are embodied in the physical features of the land (Stedman, 2003).</p>
		<p>• Wind power plants produce damage in the process of their planning as well:</p> <p>(d) Through processes of devaluation of the land (Franquesa, 2023) that renewable energy companies implement to present their facilities as importers of values to otherwise valueless lands.</p> <p>(e) By exposing and exacerbating the existing alienation of young generations from the land and accelerating the abandonment of the traditional activities that local communities foresee and fear in their near future.</p>
		<p>• Wind power plants are working to drive people away from the countryside by altering the familiar and significant interactions they have with place.</p>

Table 1. Correlation between data (Results) and arguments (Discussions) to fulfil the research aim number (i).

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>MAIN ARGUMENT (ii)</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The land and landscape as heritage maintain and ignite Sardinian identity, which in turn informs the needs for protection and claims for ownership of that heritage in the first place.</p>		
RESULTS		DISCUSSION
Newspapers	Ethnography	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of symbols of Sardinian-ness (notably, the Four Mores flag and the nuraghi). • Descriptions of renewable energy projects as attacks to the Sardinian land. • Calls for the mobilisation of all Sardinians. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-community led renewable energy projects are seen as a problem impacting all Sardinia and the Sardinian people as a whole. • Mobilisation against them is perceived as a necessary struggle to protect Sardinian identity. • The ethnic identity is taken as a reason to act to defend the land.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Squared relationships’ between local people and renewable energy companies. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three types of concern are expressed: aesthetic (that is, landscape concern), environmental and cultural. These arise locally but extend to the whole territory of Sardinia. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The characteristics of beauty, pristineness and antiquity (or continuity of life) of the land <u>are at once experienced (and valued) at the local level and conceptualised</u> (Tuan, 1975) as shared all throughout Sardinia. • <u>Nature and archaeological sites</u> are not valued separately as features of heritage significance but <u>conflated in a</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recurrent focus on the beauty and speciality of the Sardinian landscape as lying in its scenic natural features as well as in its sites of historic and cultural significance. 		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the damage to the land and the landscape as also damage to the archaeological sites (particularly Pre- and Proto-historic) that bear the memory of the local history as well as the history of the Sardinian people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern for archaeological sites in the local area. • (Mr (X) and (W)) <p><u>Continuity in traditional activities</u> (cultivation of wine) <u>from the Nuragic period.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spontaneous mention of historic-cultural sites as crucial to understand the Villanovaforru community. 	<p><u>perception of the landscape as both pristine and antique</u>. The pristineness lies in its rurality, and the antiquity lies in the historical continuity of life of the Sardinians in the place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This historical continuity is guarded in the land: that is, in the combination of the Pre- and Proto-historic archaeological sites and the natural environment in which these are located. They together form a landscape that bears witness to the ethnic history (the history of the Sardinians).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of parts of the rural territory of Sardinia as “archaeological landscape”, dotted with ancient remains both above and below the soil surface. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressed concern about losing the rurality of the territory with the building and operation of wind turbines (felt as a process of “industrialisation”). 		

Table 2. Correlation between data (Results) and arguments (Discussion) to fulfil the research aim number (ii).

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>MAIN ARGUMENT (iii)</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The proliferation of renewable energy projects in Sardinia is expression of a covert Italian nationalism: land management policies are a form of use of heritage that works to maintain and reproduce the nation-state daily.</p>		
RESULTS		DISCUSSION
Newspapers	Ethnography	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equation of wind farm projects with previous experiences of state-led exploitation of Sardinian resources: the establishment of military bases; the construction of highly pollution industries in the 1960es; the mass deforestation in the late 1800s. • The reader (or the interlocutor) needs no historical detail on these events: he/she is supposed to know them. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discontent with Italy's treatment of Sardinia as characterised by historical politics of disenfranchisement of the Sardinian people through the exploitation of local resources
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sardinians share a political memory disseminated from the bottom-up of ancient historical episodes of oppression, in which foreigners became responsible for the alteration of the land while exploiting its resources. • This constructed memory is embraced based on a direct, social memory of disenfranchisement (Assman, 2009).
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impoverishment also happened through the loss of other resources than those exploited. This is why apparently different historical events are equated: they all produced a collateral damage to the land, particularly the features that are of heritage value.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor for the Environment Marco Pala arguing that Sardinia must do its part in the energy transition “«in the 		<p>Italian banal nationalism (Billig, 1995) lies in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consideration (and management) of the Sardinian territory as national territory, with

overall interest of the Nation»” (<i>La Nuova</i> , 2023).		<p>consequent expectations of national solidarity and loyalty from its inhabitants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The idea that there is such a thing as an ‘overall interest of the Nation’ to which Sardinian people must submit and which at the same time includes them.
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Table 3. Correlation between data (Results) and arguments (Discussion) to fulfil the research aim number (ii).

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