



CONFERENCE STS PERSPECTIVES ON ENERGY

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*Solar energy in the news:
national and local
media coverage of a
solar power plant in
Alentejo*

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The project

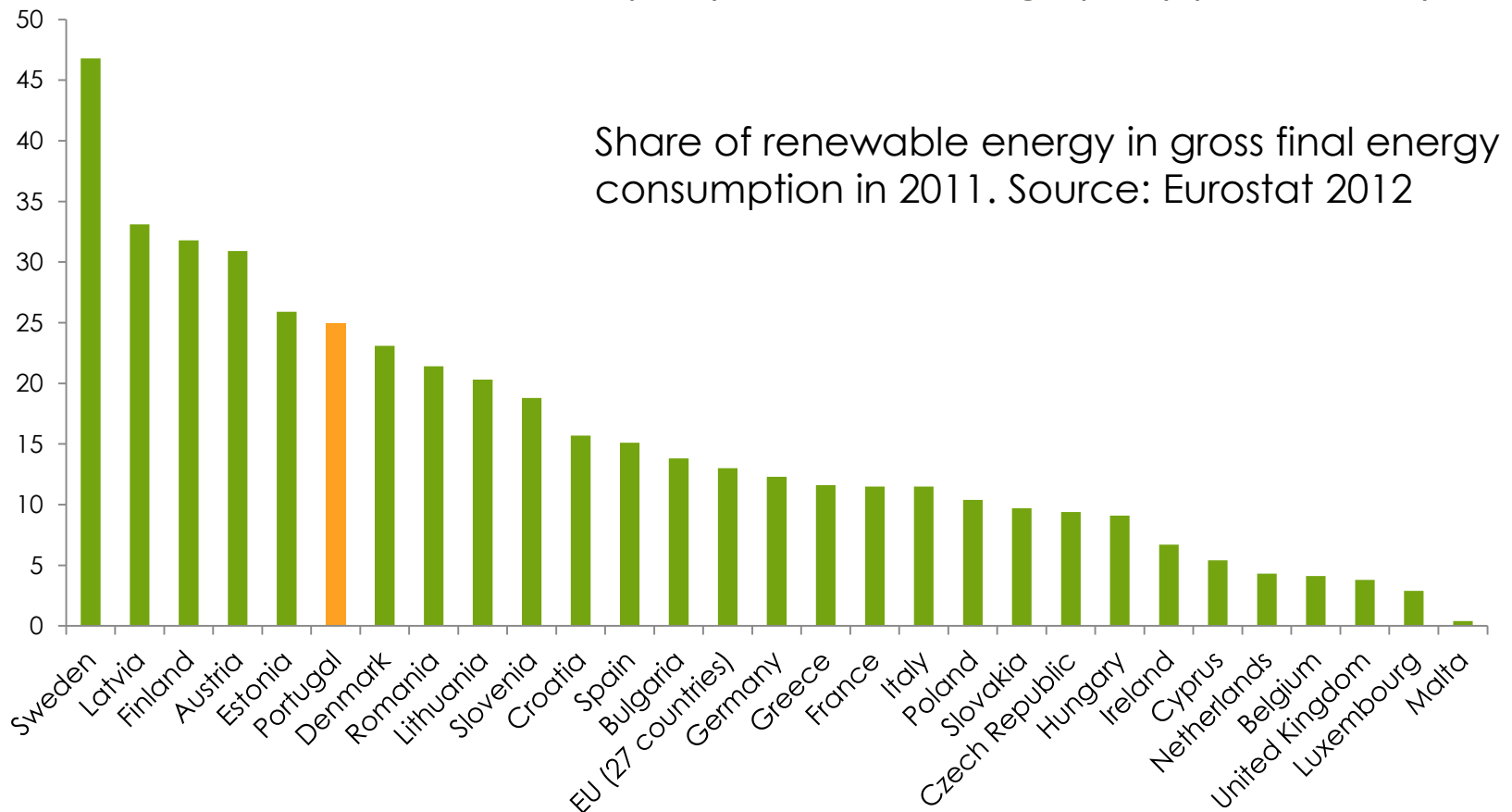
- Title: **Socio-technical consensus and controversies regarding renewable energies**
- Institutions: ICS-Univ. Lisbon, Univ. Aveiro, CRIA
- Funding: FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology (PTDC/CS-ECS/118877/2010)
- Duration: March 2012-August 2014
- Main aim: to understand social attitudes towards macro-generation of renewable energies, namely solar and wind power plants, by examining the social consensus and controversies around these technologies in Portugal.
- Main tasks: analysis of the political, social and scientific framework of renewable energy production in Portugal; media and public opinion analysis; case studies of wind farms and solar power plants

Introduction: solar power plants

- Technological artefacts that spring up in rural locations, changing the landscape and the social relations around them
- Case study: solar power plant in Amareleja, southern Portugal
- Public discourses regarding this solar power plant, in order to understand:
 - how this technological artefact is being construed
 - impact it has on communities and the
 - possible obstacles to the development of this source of energy

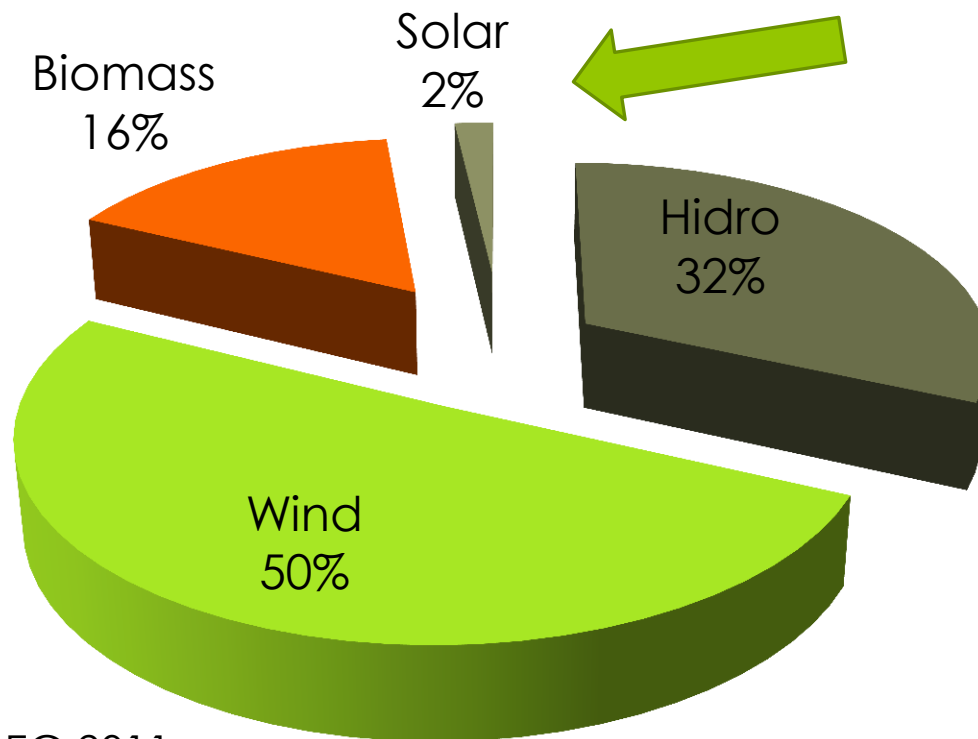
Share of renewable energy in the EU

- Portugal's electricity production from renewable energies comes mainly from hydropower (43%) and wind energy (42%) (DGEG 2012).



Renewable energy in Portugal

Electricity production



Source: DGEG 2011

Photovoltaic power plants

Amareleja/Moura

45.8 MW

250 ha

2,520 solar panels
(trackers)



Source: EN2P, INEGI

Method and data: national press

- Selection of all news items by searching for the keywords “renewable”, “wind”, “solar”, “photovoltaic”
- From 2001 to February 2013
- A random sample of 25% of the articles published by each newspaper was selected from a total of 2201 news items and subject to quantitative content analysis.

National newspapers	Type of newspaper	Number of articles	Articles (%)
Público	Daily quality	112	20,3
Correio da Manhã	Daily popular	120	21,8
Jornal de Negócios	Daily economic	230	41,7
Expresso	Weekly quality	89	16,2
Total (sample)		551	100,0

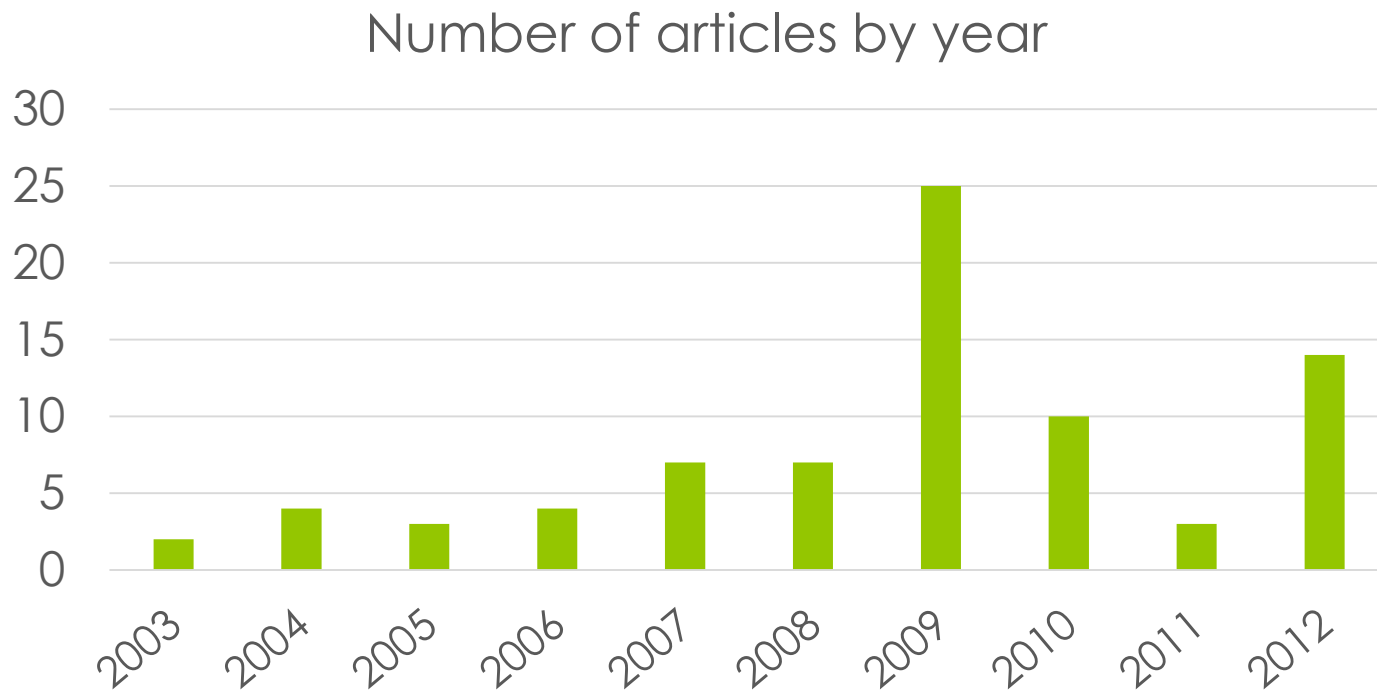
Method and data: local press

- Selection of all news related to solar energy, the Solar Plant in Amareleja and its associated projects
- From 2001 to 2012
- 215 articles from the local newspaper “A Planície”

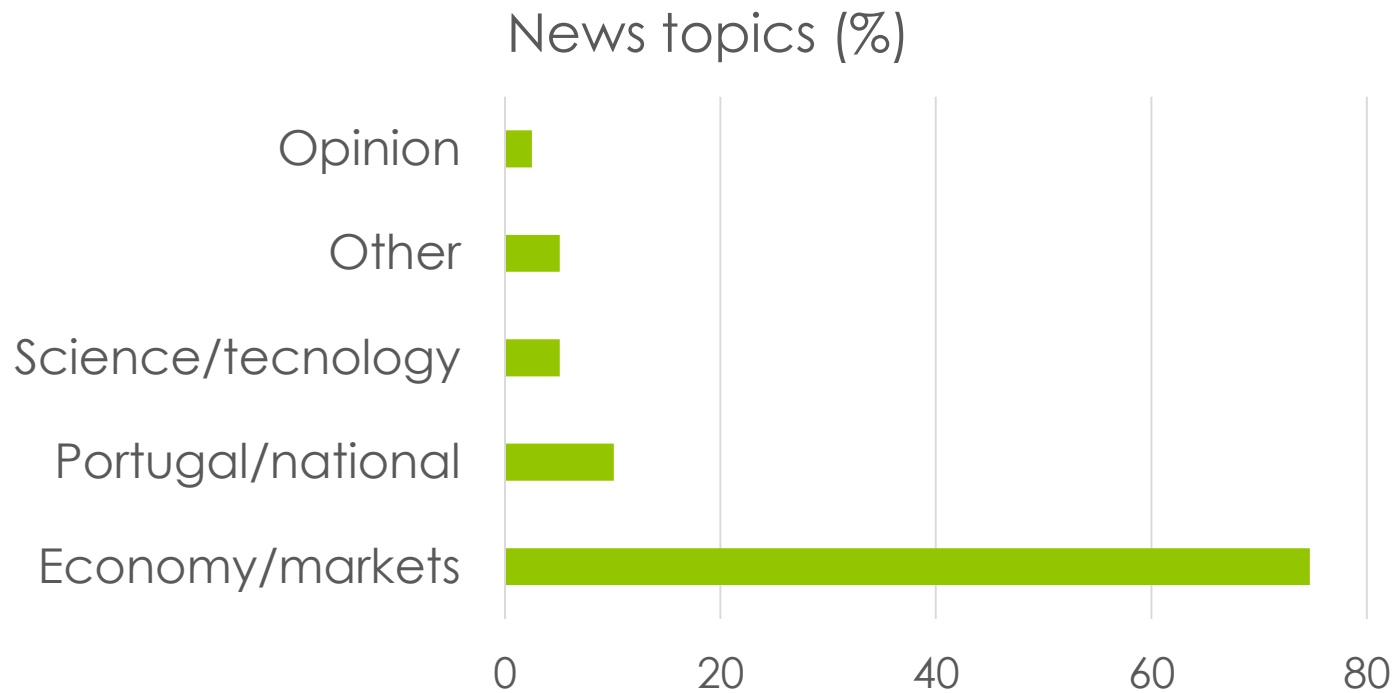
Renewable energies in national news coverage: main results

- Investment in renewable energies as a government flagship:
 - “[Government’s] First priority to modernize the country is «leading the energy revolution»” (*Público*, 2/11/2009)
- Creation of a positive image of the country’s energy production (clean, endogenous, low impact, inexhaustible)
- Heavy reliance on two main news sources: corporations and government, both with strong vested interests (business and political)
- Reduced debate and controversy
- Scarce representation of environmental NGO’s and other citizen groups; absence of the general public

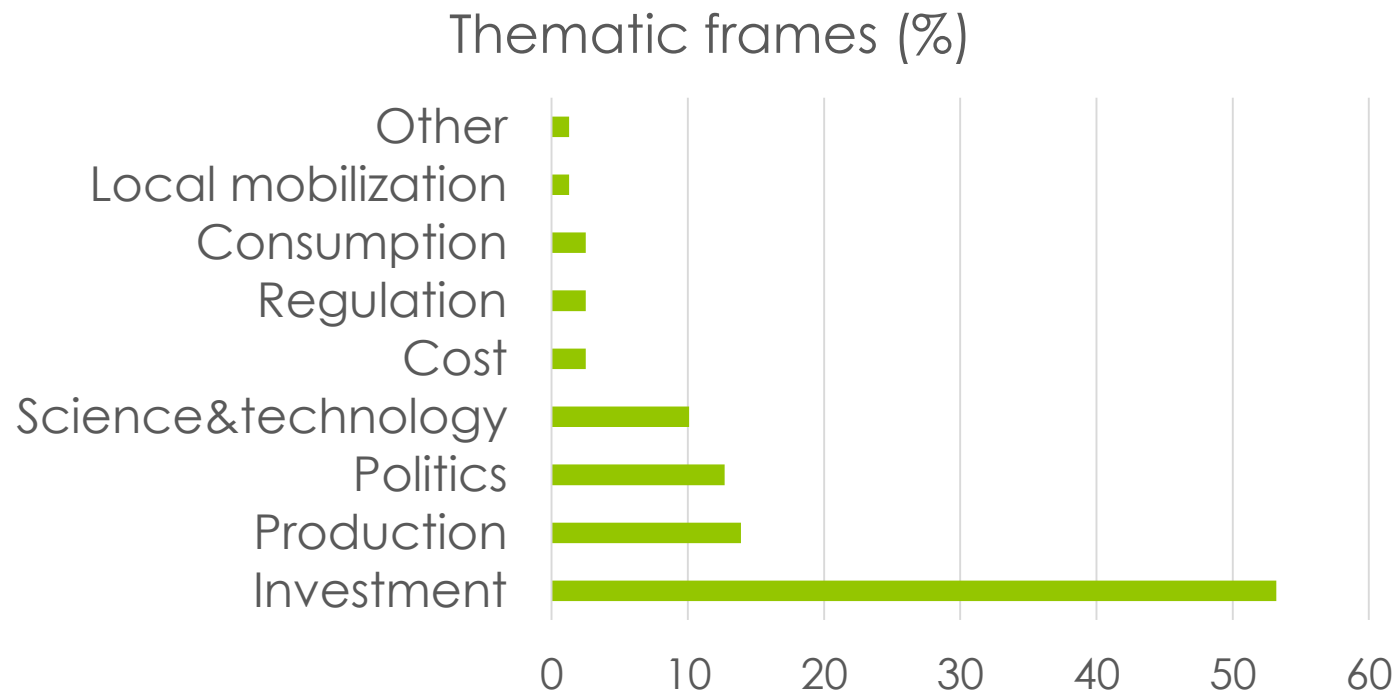
Solar energy coverage in national press



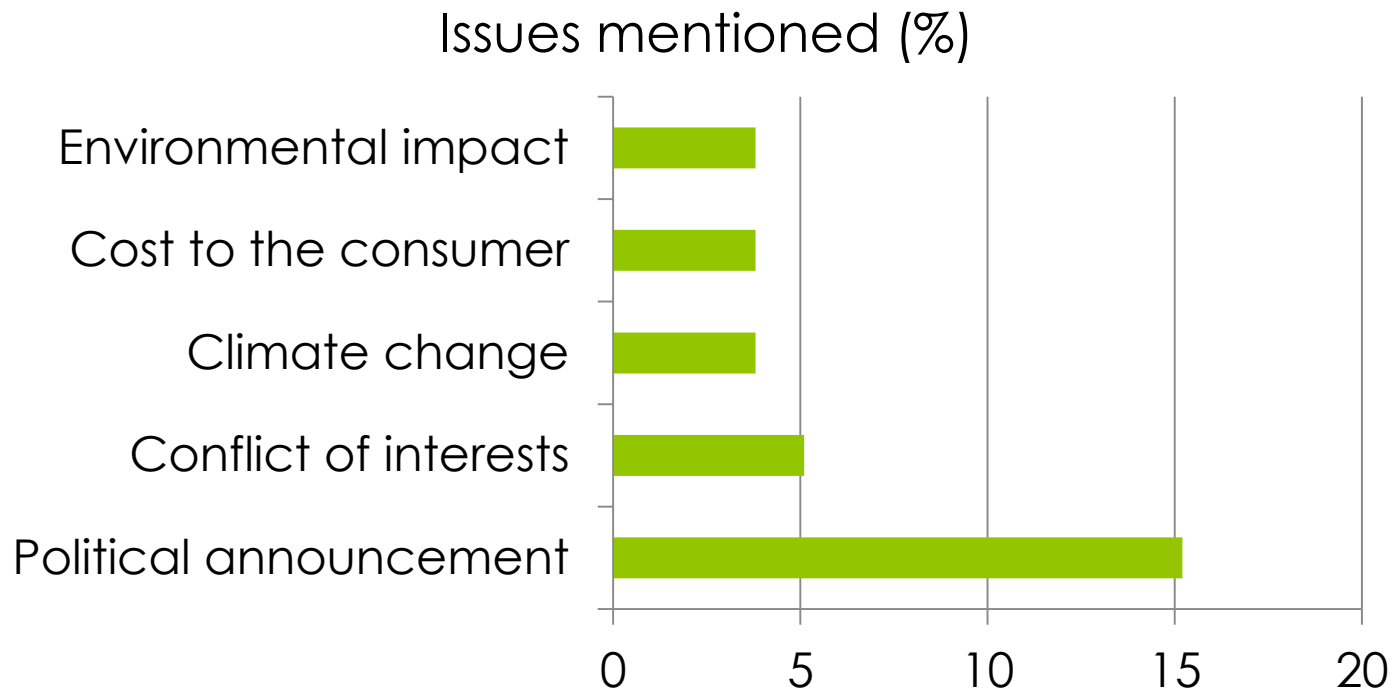
Solar energy coverage in national press



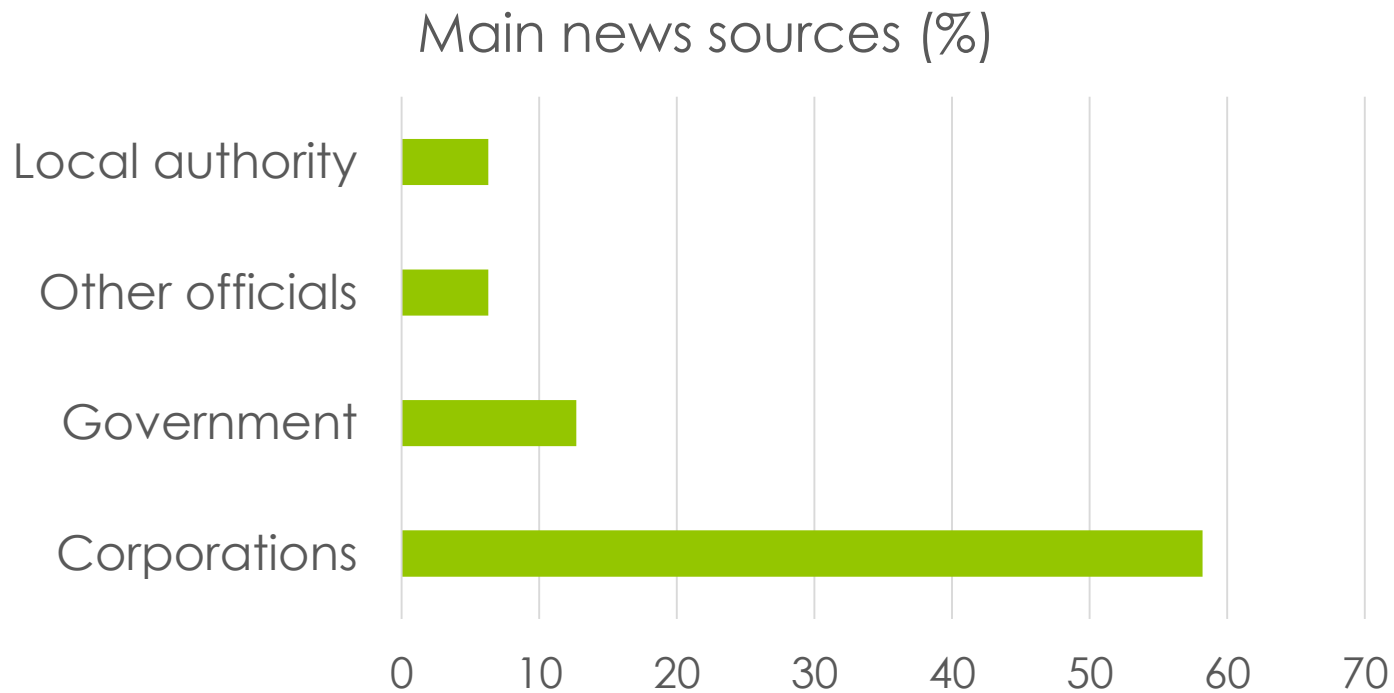
Solar energy coverage in national press



Solar energy coverage in national press



Solar energy coverage in national press



Solar energy coverage in national press: positive views

- Technological optimism:
 - “25% of electricity might come from the Sun” (*Expresso*, 14/05/2010)
- Good investment opportunity:
 - “Moura: Promoter of photovoltaic plant says that investment will appreciate in value eight times” (*Público*, 26/05/2004)
- Self-praise:
 - “Amareleja hosts largest photovoltaic plant in the world” (*Expresso*, 29/11/2008)

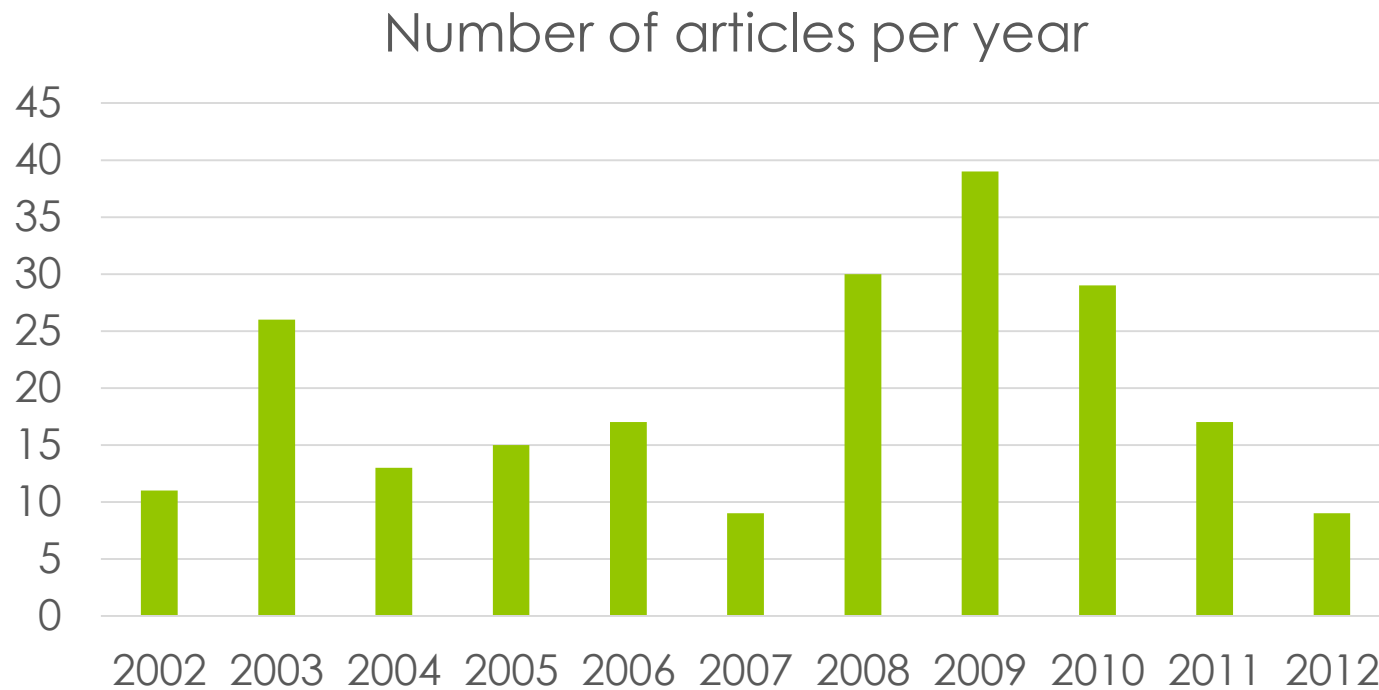
Solar energy coverage in national press: negative views

- Cost of renewable energy's tariffs:
 - “Energy: Solar can only be profitable because “someone pays a generous tariff” – Ferreira de Oliveira [president of Galp, the Portuguese oil and gas operator]” (*Expresso*, 16/02/2012)

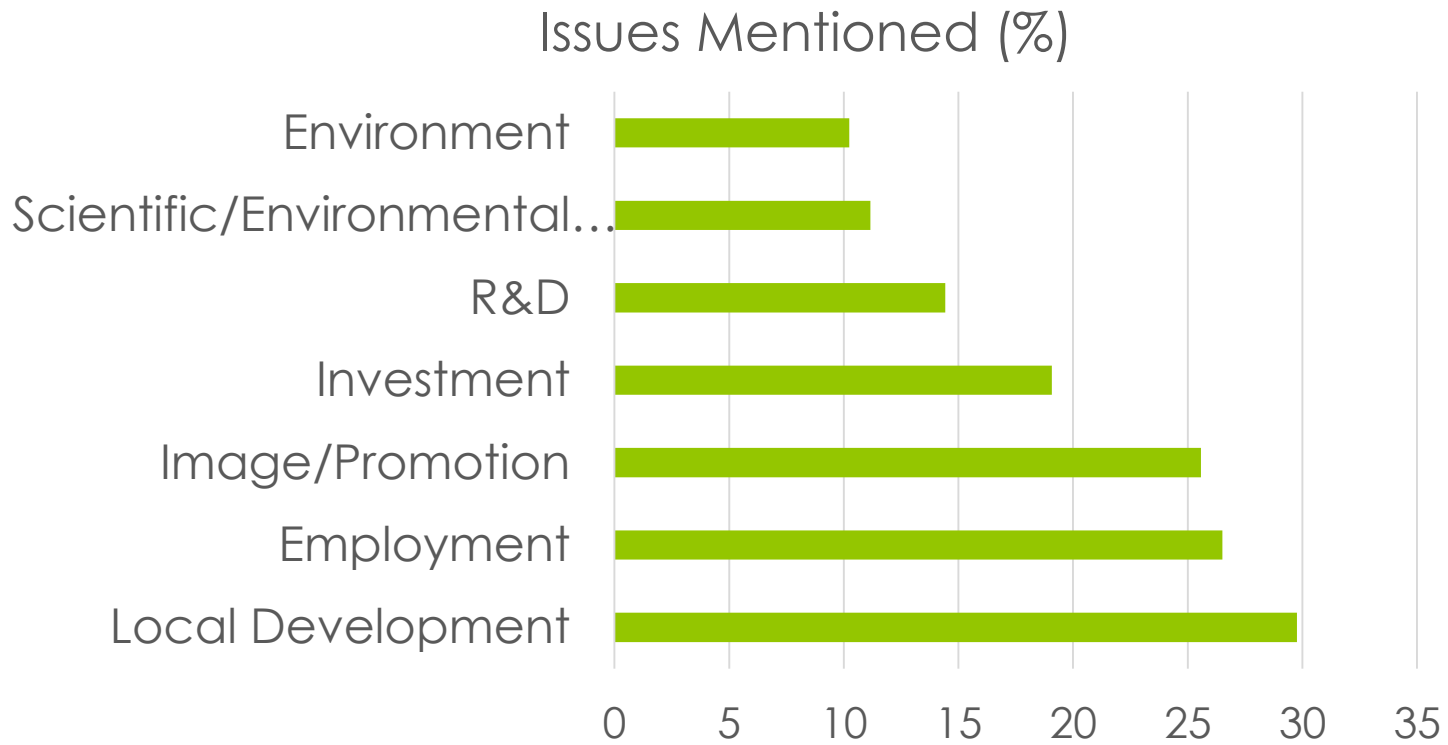
Solar energy coverage in local press: main results

- ◉ Investment in solar energy as promoter of local development and job creation
- ◉ Modernization of the municipality through R&D and the creation of an high tech cluster around solar energy
- ◉ National and international promotion of the municipality and the region
- ◉ Heavy reliance on the Mayor and the City Hall as news sources
- ◉ Under-representation of local opposition and civil society organizations

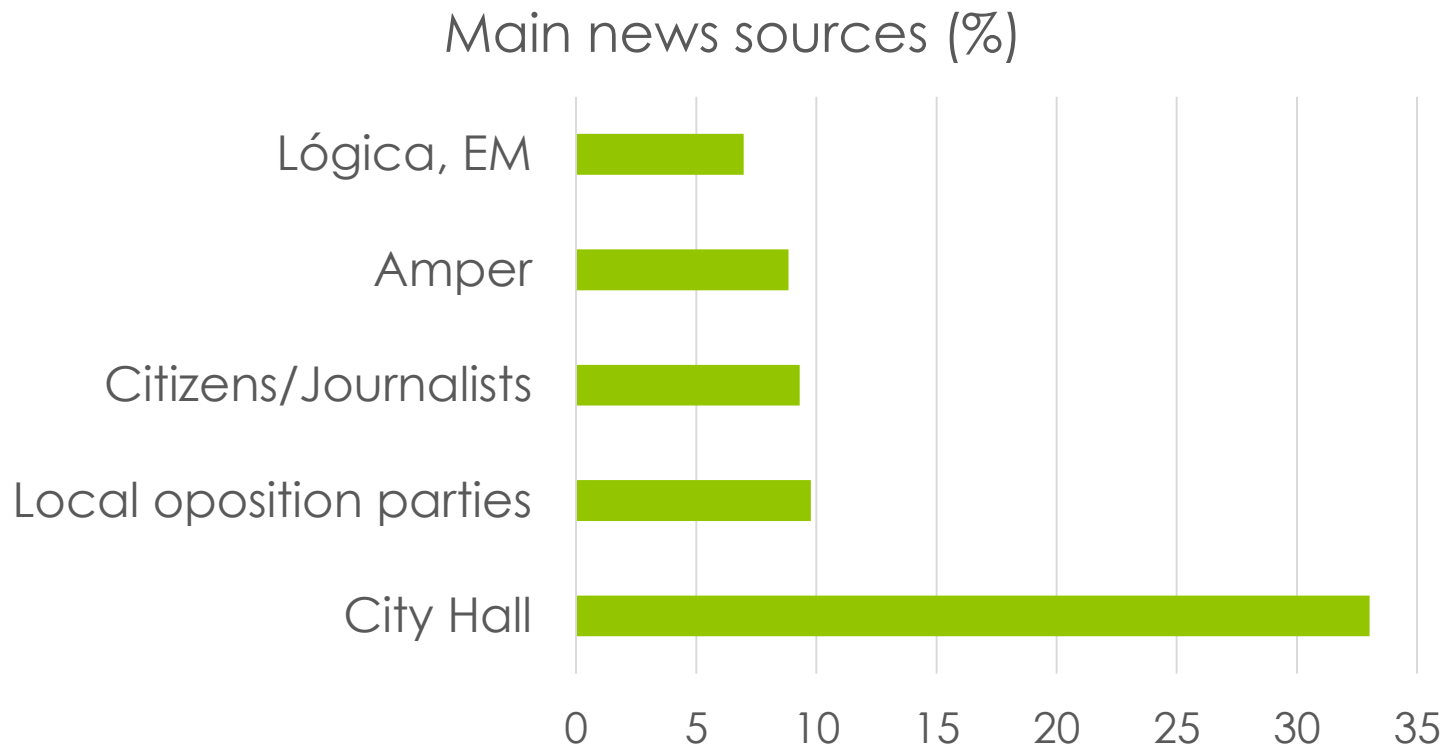
Solar energy coverage in local press



Solar energy coverage in local press



Solar energy coverage in local press



Solar energy coverage in local press: positive views

- ◉ Impact on employment:
 - ◉ “We are certain that the volume of investment and the direct and indirect job creation, associated with this project, will have very positive influence on the social and economic development of the municipality and the region” (15/11/2006)
- ◉ Modernization:
 - ◉ “one of the most important initiatives (...) is the creation of a photovoltaic research lab. It will allow for research and development projects and for the development of the photovoltaic sector in the city’s technological park” (01/09/2005)
- ◉ Local self-esteem:
 - ◉ “It is with great satisfaction and pride that we receive the biggest solar plant in the World” (01/05/2008)

Solar energy coverage in local press: negative views

- Low impact on job creation:
 - “The impact of the plant on job creation is minimal. (...) and 6 months after its inauguration the technological park is still not growing” (15/01/09)
- Unjust distribution of gains:
 - “We get the trackers and others get the profits” (15/10/06)

Discussion

- The coverage of solar energy peaked in the year after the construction of the plant at both national and local level, but the interest in the topic quickly faded away
- Both levels focus on the creation of a positive image of the country/municipality
- Heavier focus on employment and socioeconomic development at the local level
- Scarce representation of civil society at both levels