

Renewable Energy: when online communication goes *global*

Positioning, performance, challenges
and opportunities of eight global players

Summary

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Which players are emerging on the international web?

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E.ON, Rwe and Enel diversify their online presence

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The green transition generates enthusiasm, but also strong criticisms. How to navigate this?



How do energy companies active in the green transition communicate on the world wide web? Which themes do they emerge on, and with what level of attention from users?

To answer this question, we conducted an analysis of conversations that appeared online in English during the last six months of 2022, comparing eight brands considered leaders in the international electricity and renewable energy market. The players monitored were Rwe, Enel, Iberdrola, Engie, Ørsted, E-on, Edp, Naturgy. Below, we summarise the main findings and some insights for a sometimes not-easy but consistent and long-term winning communication strategy in the network.

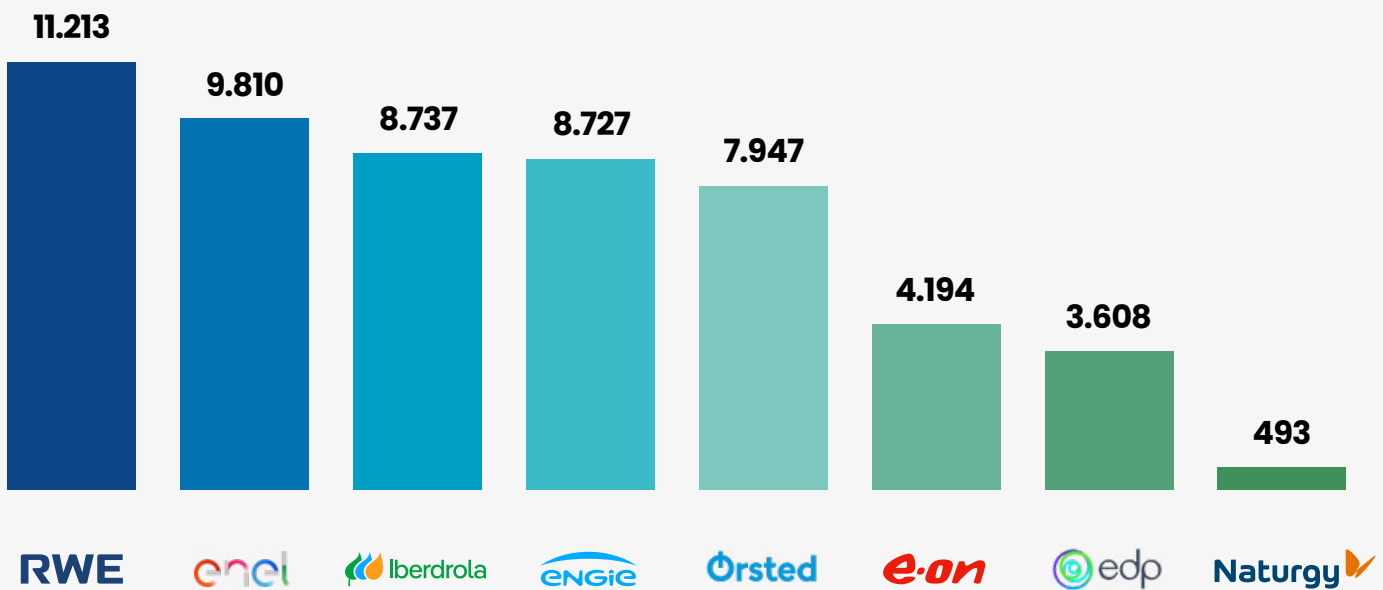
01

**Which players
are emerging on
the international
web?**

In terms of volume, the most mentioned brands were the German utility **RWE** (11,000 mentions) and **Enel** (9,000 mentions). Their greater presence in news articles and online media could indicate greater attention from newsrooms, but also a greater willingness on behalf of companies to invest in international communication strategies than their competitors, who tend to focus on national or local strategies.

Following at a similar distance are **Iberdrola** (8,737 mentions), **Engie** (8,727) and **Ørsted** (7,947). **E.ON**, **EDP** and **Naturgy** do not seem to stand out enough in the international online debate: while the first two do not exceed 4,000 mentions in English, Naturgy gets a few hundred, including articles, posts and tweets.

Fig. 1 Comparison of the number of citations in English for the brands in the study over the 6-month period.



Most companies are positioning themselves with news of **new wind** and solar installations around the world, joint ventures for new rene-

wable energy supplies, **investments in clean hydrogen** and innovative projects for the **hybrid use of multiple energy sources**.

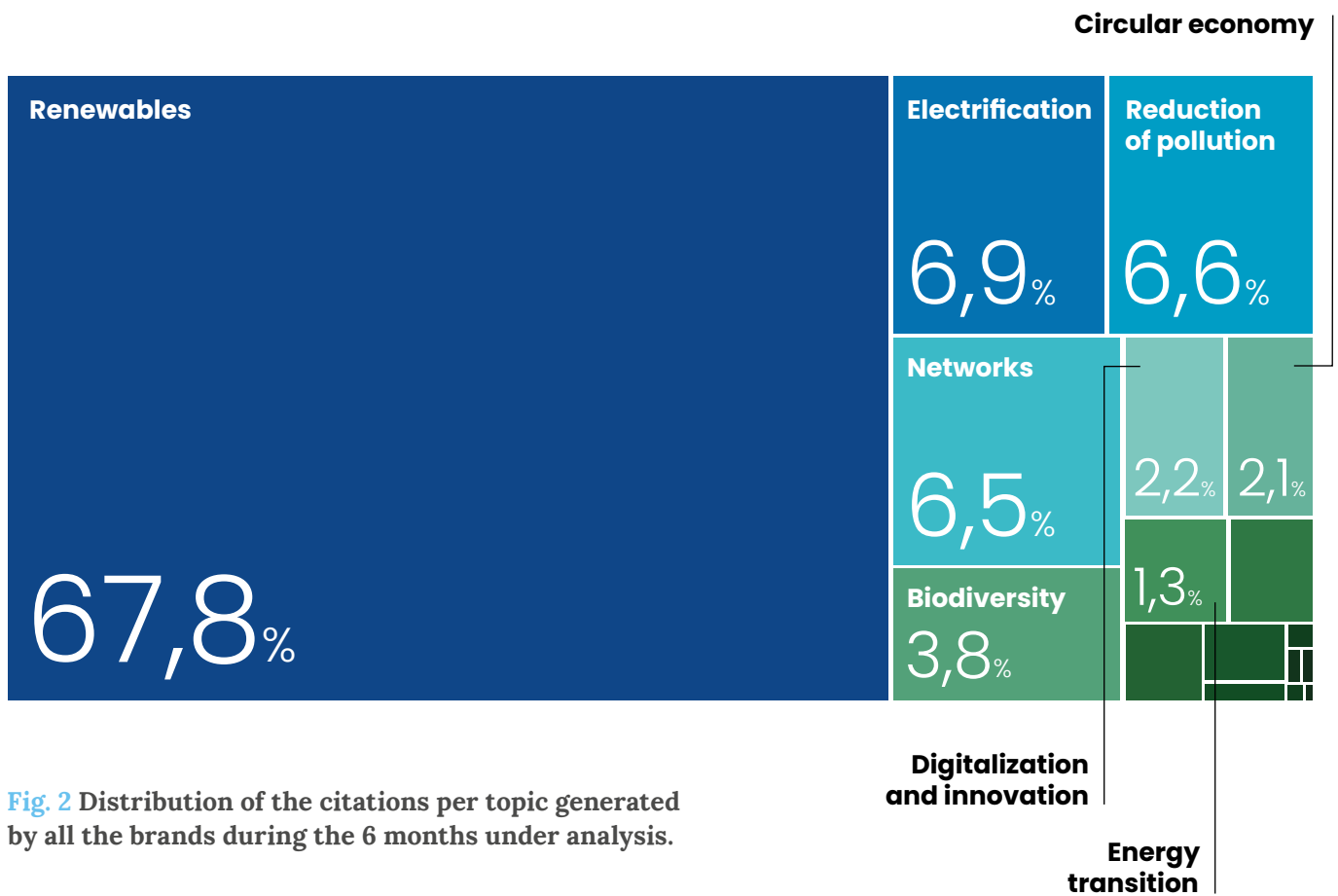


Fig. 2 Distribution of the citations per topic generated by all the brands during the 6 months under analysis.

It is **Rwe and Ørsted** that get the most green clicks and keystrokes, collecting more likes, comments, and retweets than the other brands.



The most engagement occurs when it comes to investments or new **wind, solar, hydrogen, or hydropower** plants (in terms of the most likes collected).

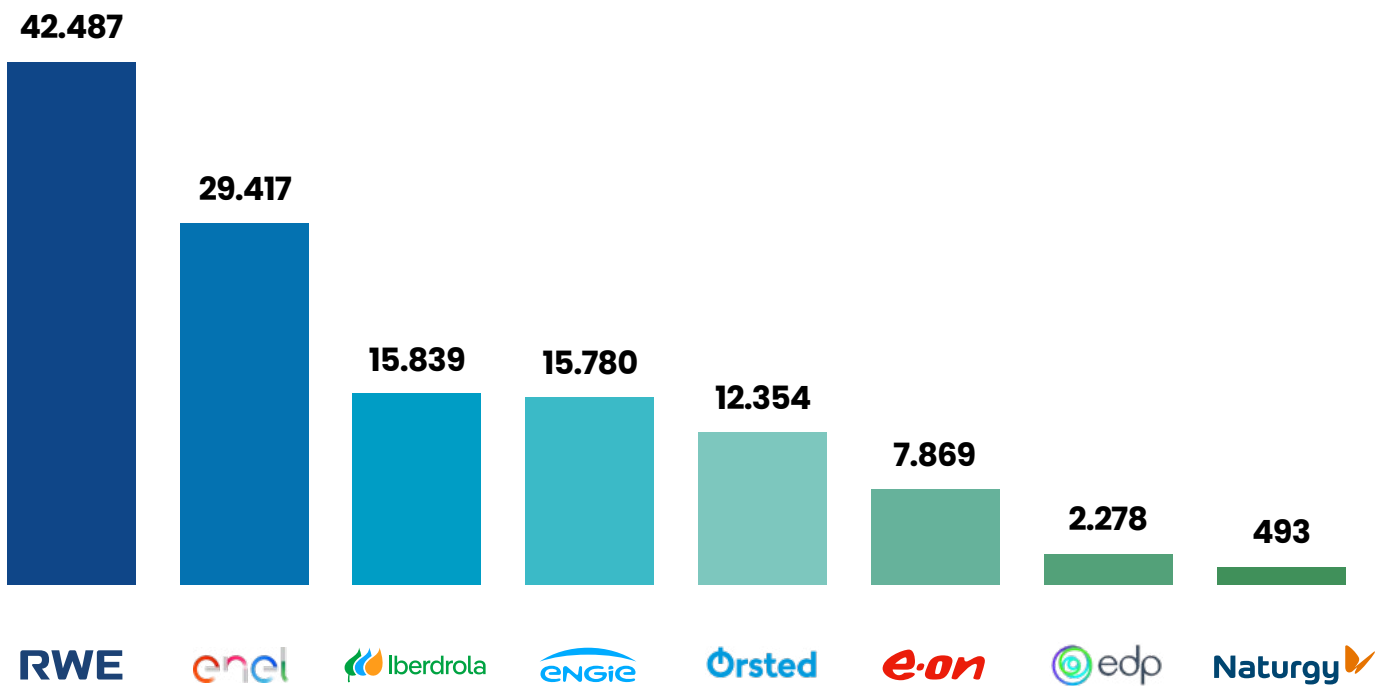


Fig. 3 Comparison of the volume of interactions over the 6-month analysis period.

02

**E.ON, Rwe and
Enel diversify
their online
presence**

While renewables are the driving theme on the web for all, **E.ON** is an exception. It is cited mainly on the topic of distribution networks and smart meters (41.6 per cent citations vs. 32.3 per cent content on renewables). The company also has good visibility on electrification in developing countries or less accessible areas or system modernisation in Europe (13.2%), with higher volumes than the other players analysed.

Germany's **RWE** maintains a primary focus on renewables, but then it is also the only one with shares above 20 per cent on another topic: **environment and circular economy** (28.3 per cent). Users and the media particularly appreciated the Renewable Market Watch Report results, which recognised RWE as one of the top European players in **photovoltaics** and new **green investments**. These include the \$2.4 billion investment in Qatar to phase out coal-fired power; the Thor project, which will be Denmark's largest offshore wind farm when completed; and the *Offshore Wind Community*, which will provide New York State (USA) with 1.3 GW of clean wind power, enough to power 500,000 homes.

Enel leads the way with 59.6% of its content focused on renewables, surpassing its competitors in discussions about **electrification** (16.6%, compared to E.ON's 13.2% and Engie's 12.9%) and **distribution networks** (9.1%, well above the 6.1% average for other brands, excluding E.ON). Furthermore, Enel exceeds the other brands when it comes to **sustainable investments, innovation** and **digitalisation**.

Enel is receiving attention for being among the top 6 players in the renewable energy market worldwide and among the top producers and suppliers in Latin America. Its surge in fame could also be due to Enel taking the lead in Australia's first hybrid solar farm & battery storage project and in the agreement with *Fortescue Future Industries* on clean hydrogen. The Network is also taking an interest in the new and important investments in renewables in the USA and Canada, the distribution of Enel X charging systems in Italy and the agreement with *Urban V* for green air mobility.



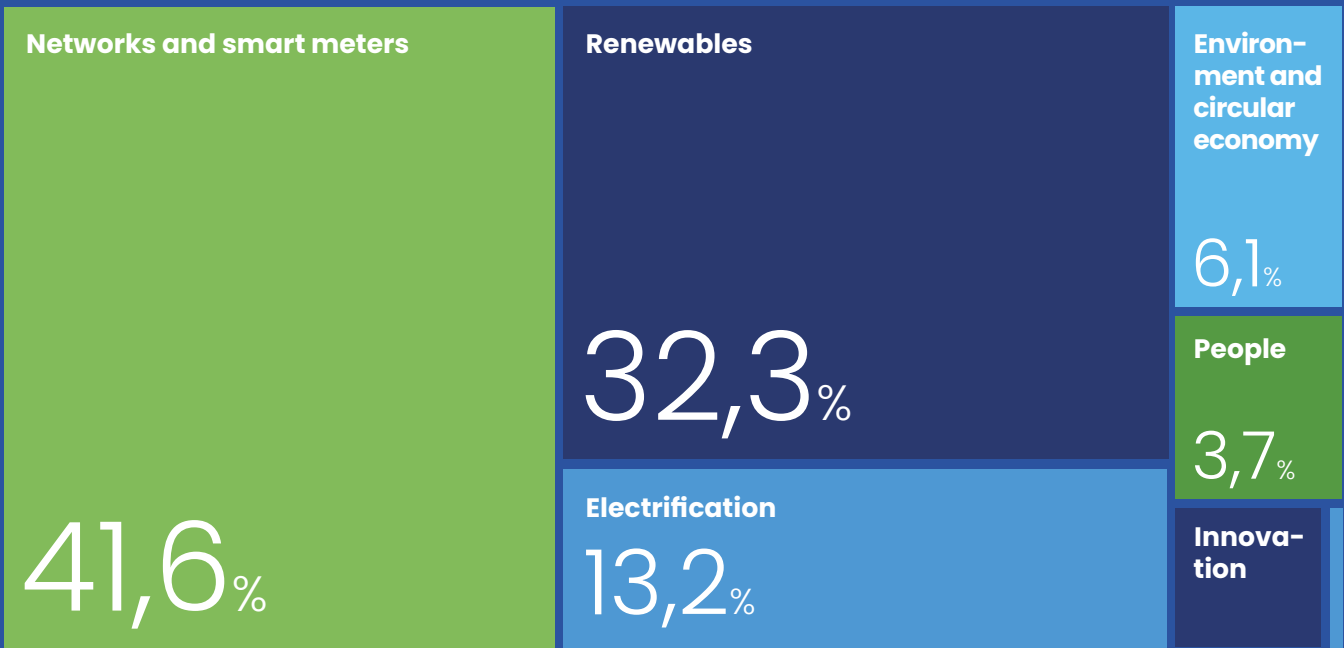


Fig. 4 Distribution of E.ON brand mentions per topic in the 6-month period under review.



Fig. 5 Distribution of mentions of the RWE brand by topic in the 6-month period under review.

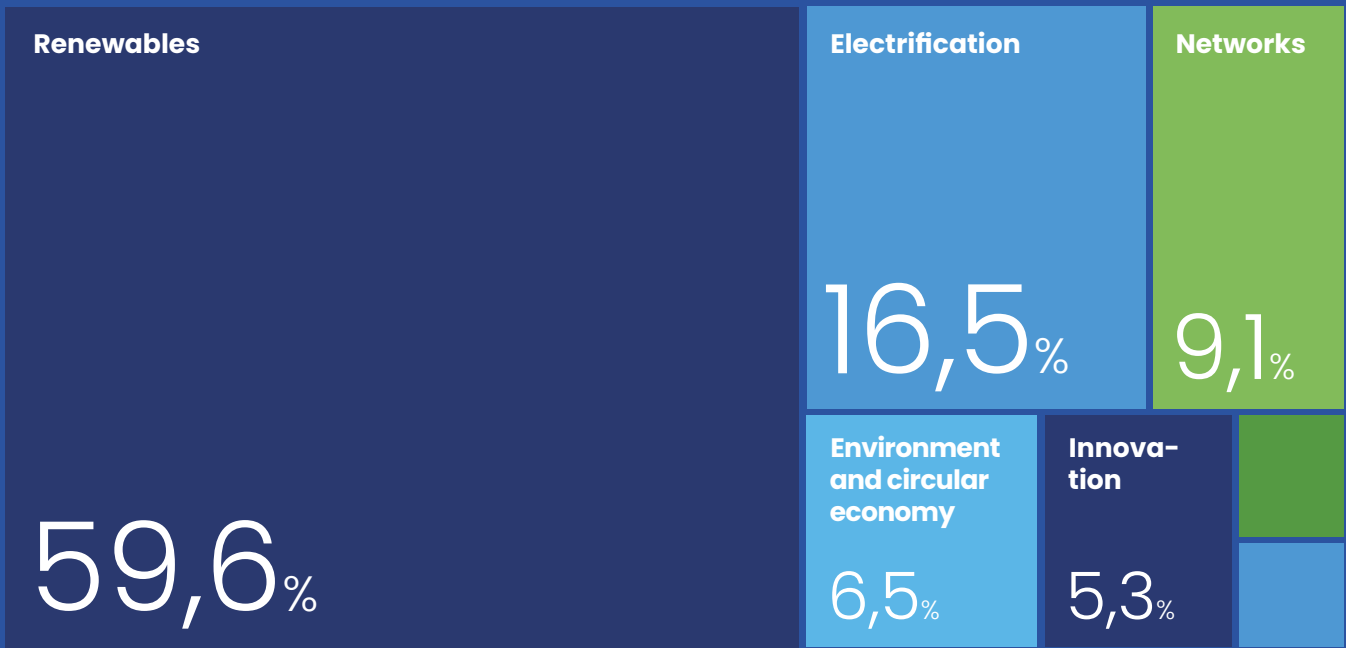


Fig. 6 Distribution of mentions of the Enel brand by topic in the 6 months under review.



Fig. 7 Distribution of brands by theme over the 6 months under review.

03

The green transition generates enthusiasm, but also strong criticisms. How to navigate this?

In terms of sentiment, brands are gaining **praise and recognition for their investment and commitment** to switching to renewable energy and new projects being launched around the world for a greener future. For example, the *Renewable Market Watch Report* cites them as the world's top players in wind, solar PV and clean hydrogen, in particular Engie, Enel Green Power and Iberdrola. However, local communities are also very **critical of the implications of a green future**. Sometimes, this is because of the possible impact the energy transition can have on family budgets (think of the transition to electric motors or green heating systems, for example); conversely, at other times, criticism arises from these large companies' continued investments in coal in order to cope with the energy crisis. New concerns are emerging about the environmental impact of the **massive expansion of onshore and offshore wind farms** around the world, and the future costs (again, environmental and pollution) of **decommissioning and disposing of wind turbines and lithium batteries**.

Certainly, leading the new energy era is a daunting mission, especially when accompanied by international media visibility that generates great attention and high expectations, leaving little room and time for the gradual optimisation of solutions and projects.

The challenges and unknowns are numerous. What could make a difference is **consistency and transparency in communication** (and, of course, in operations). For example, the major players could embrace the green challenge by sharing its details, uncertainties, and unknowns, as well as its successes and actual results, with a constant focus on the people and ecosystems involved in their projects.

The RWE's case may provide useful lessons

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What could make a difference is **consistency and transparency in communication** (and in operations).

for the present and future of large energy groups (as detailed in the box), urging a **persistent, passionate and coherent daily description of the ongoing transition** and its possible impacts or improvements. Let's be clear: the goal isn't to solve every issue or silence criticism overnight. It's about addressing challenges head-on with expertise, demonstrating a genuine commitment to accelerating our ecological growth strategy, and ultimately shaping a future that's demonstrably more sustainable.

RWE Insight: environmentalists' intervention turns green communication into a reputational boomerang

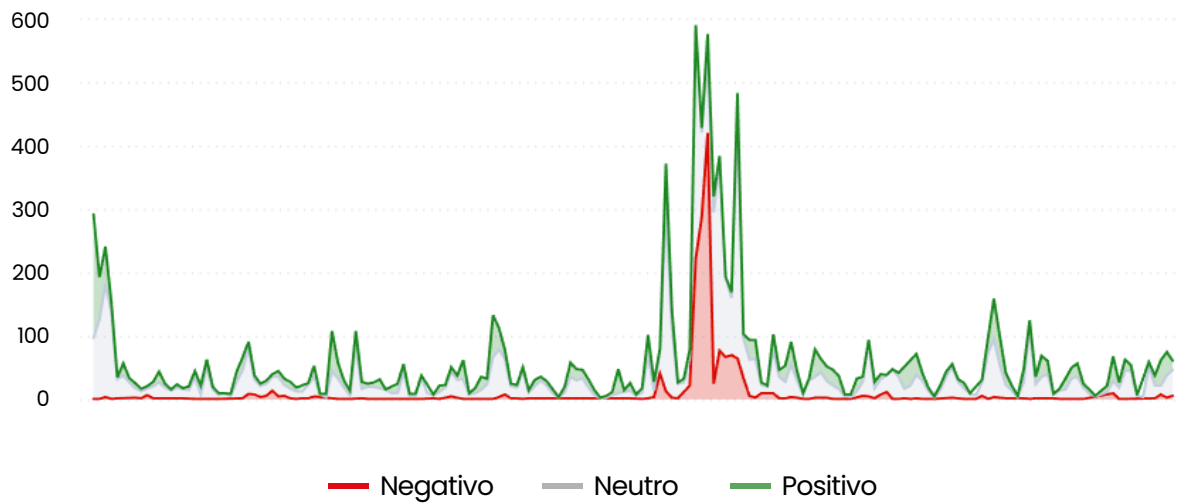
Since 2020, RWE, Germany's second-largest energy provider after E.ON, has been investing in a communication campaign centred on **the environment, clean energy, people, and technology**. Through **daily and multi-channel storytelling** via videos, podcasts, and articles,

RWE emphasises its commitment to creating an environmentally and climatically neutral energy world, thanks to the essential value of its team and the technological innovation of its new facilities (renewables, offshore and floating, battery storage, and wind turbine recycling).



Fig. 8 RWE communication campaign launched in 2020.

Fig. 9 RWE brand sentiment spread between 2022 and 2023.



The strategy initially saw success during the analysed months, achieving the highest number of English mentions compared to competitors (Fig. 1) and generating the best user engagement (Fig. 3). However, this engagement wasn't entirely positive, with consequences spilling into 2023.

While RWE states with conviction that it believes in an environmentally sustainable and carbon-neutral near future (including promises

to double clean energy production by 2026 and invest over 50 million euros by 2030), the Essen-based company is heavily criticised for choosing to cope with the energy crisis by continuing to burn lignite until 2040 and for still being one of the most polluting electricity companies in Europe. Additionally, user concerns linger regarding the potential impact of future high-impact offshore wind and floating solar facilities on the marine ecosystem.



A surge of negativity towards RWE arose in 2022-2023 due to the **Garzweiler lignite mine** in Western Germany, which was further fuelled by Greta Thunberg’s involvement in street protests and a rapid spread of online and offline resistance. The controversy stemmed from the company’s decision to expand the mine in order to secure Germany’s energy supply. However, the operation would lead to

either. Their construction of the **East Celtic** offshore wind farm in Ireland, initially hailed as a green success story, has been met with online criticism. Local environmental groups and users have raised concerns about the lack of a thorough and transparent environmental impact assessment. This situation has ignited



Fig. 10 A picture of the environmentalists’ protest in Lützerath (which continued into 2023), with Greta Thunberg participating.

the destruction of the nearby town of Lützerath and the forced eviction of its inhabitants. Now a ghost town, it was repopulated within days, this time by environmentalists opposed to the planned expansion and new investment in fossil fuels.

RWE’s green efforts haven’t gone unchallenged

a heated debate about the true environmental impact of aggressive offshore energy policies, particularly on marine ecosystems. Consequently, RWE’s image has taken a significant hit. Within weeks, the company went from being seen as a leader in building a sustainable future to being labelled Europe’s most polluting company and promoting an energy expansion that simply displaces problems instead of solving them.

Who are the 8 global brands that we analyzed

EDP Portuguese producer and supplier of clean energy, active in Europe, North America, Mexico and Brazil.

ENEL Italian group, one of the world's leading companies in electricity, renewable energy and gas. It operates in 31 countries worldwide.

ENGIE French operator in the low-carbon energy sector, a key player in Europe and a world leader in energy transition.

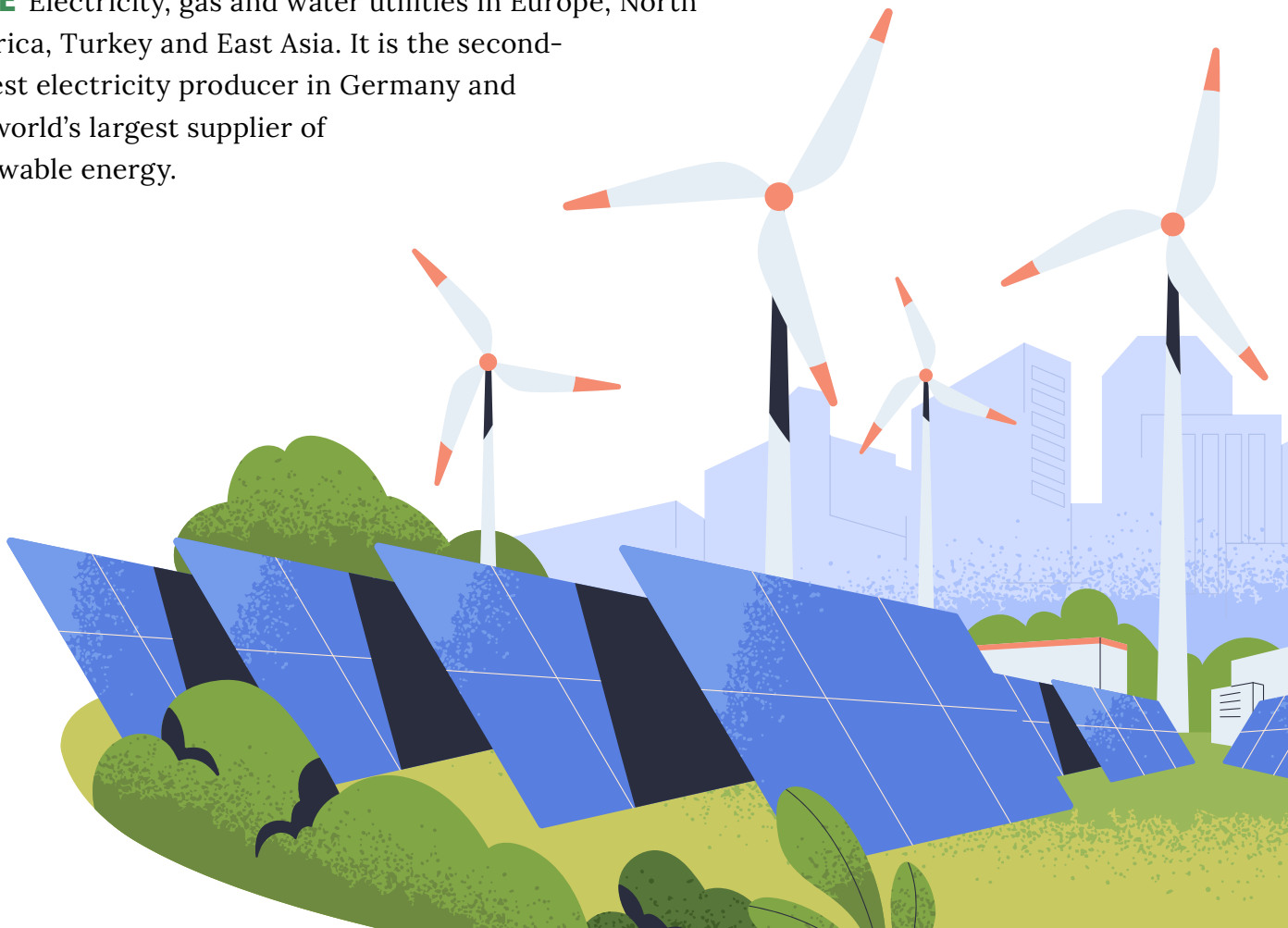
E.ON Germany's largest power producer, operating mainly in Europe, Russia, North America, Brazil and Turkey in the renewables sector.

IBERDROLA Spanish clean energy operator active in Europe, North America, Brazil, Australia and Japan.

NATURGY Spanish group active in the electricity and gas sectors in Europe, Algeria, Central and South America, Asia and Australia.

ØRSTED Danish electricity producer and supplier, world leader in offshore wind power, active in Europe, the US and Asia.

RWE Electricity, gas and water utilities in Europe, North America, Turkey and East Asia. It is the second-largest electricity producer in Germany and the world's largest supplier of renewable energy.





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