**Reviewers' comments:**

**Reviewer #1:**

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| --- |
| Dear reviewer #1,  Thank you for your helpful suggestions |

Summary:  
The manuscript analyzes how the decrease in the PV price and other characteristics of solar resources affect the optimal share of electricity demand supplied by solar in different energy systems. The authors studied four isolated regions and a multi-country, networked, sector-coupled model of the European energy system. They found that assumptions of system properties such as transmission or sector coupling can greatly affect the optimal solar penetration at the country level.  
  
The following comments/suggestions are divided into “highly recommended/required” and “optional.” I would appreciate if you could reply to the “highly recommended/required” comments. Moreover, I hope the “optional” comments add value to the manuscript.  
  
Highly recommended/required:

Abstract:

1. Page 1, Line 19 (left column): “isolated regions, with only wind and solar generation allowed” did you use storage as well?

Yes, we used battery storage. This was made explicit in the abstract.

Methods:  
2. Page 2, Line 51 (left column): I think 2011 is too old. The same data set has 2019 data; why did you use 2011? You can also check the following link for the 2021 data for California (<http://www.caiso.com/informed/Pages/ManagingOversupply.aspx>)

Update year. Change data. Rerun experiment

3. Page 2, Line 55 (left column): reference [20] has the CF for Solar in Europe. It has 5 data sets 1-axis tracking, 2-axis tracking, Delta, Optimal, and rooftop. Which one did you use?

Choose one

4. How did you get the CF for solar and wind for CA and CO? Did you select a specific location in each state and get the data for this location, or you got an average CF across the state

Renewables ninja. Sentence

5. Figure 1: Can you add the data source in the figure caption, please?

Yes

6. Figure 1: I was expecting a seasonality in the solar CF in California and Colorado, as mentioned in figure 1 in the publication in point 3. Can you recheck this figure?

Check Figure 1. Update data

7. Page 2, Line 55 (right column): “we assume that all heating demand ….”. Do you have any reason/reference for this selection?

Use a reason/reference from one of Marta’s previous papers

8. Page 3, Line 2 (left column): for the 17˚C, do you have any reason/reference for this selection?

Use a reason/reference from one of Marta’s previous papers

9. Page 3, Line 16 (left column): “To estimate the total heating demand, we assume that the percentage of household heating demand of the total is the same as that of the electricity demand.” Do you have any justification/reference for this assumption?

No? Sentence

10. Page 3, Line 32 (right column): “Nevertheless, we plot values up to 0.01 C/Wp as an academic exercise to better understand what would happen in a universe with extremely cheap solar.” Should it be down to instead of up to?

Yes, fix

11. Figure 4: it is nice to relate between the source of energy and the color used in the figure, but I am not able to distinguish between solar elect + heat and solar elec, especially for Spain also the same for Wind elec + heat and Wind elec.

Change colors. Redo plot

12. Figure 4: Can you add to the figure legend what is the orange line and the light Orange line

Yes, fix

Results:  
13. Figure 5: Is the red number for each case the average for all the countries?

Total? Or overall average?. Sentence

14. Page 4, Line 59 (right column): last line, you may need to add the figure number.

Added Figure number

15. Figure 6: you can use a smaller yellow dot size than the red one to show both.

Modify plot to use smaller yellow dot

16. The x-axis is too small and full of X-tick marks; you may use a double column if possible.

Use double column/modify plot

Reference  
17. Reference [10]: talks about wind, not solar; it is mentioned in the text to refer to solar.

Ok change reference

18. References [27] and [28] are the same thing; moreover, ref. [28] should be related to Europe’s goals of getting to neutral by 2050. You may find this interesting link <https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-strategies-targets/2050-long-term-strategy_en>

Fix reference, add link

Optional:  
Introduction:  
1. Line 54: you may find the following links interesting as well:  
<https://electrek.co/2022/05/02/california-runs-on-100-clean-energy-for-the-first-time-with-solar-dominating/>  
<https://www.solarpowerworldonline.com/2022/04/california-grid-set-record-with-97-percent-renewable-power-april-3/>

Day April 30 in this link  <https://www.caiso.com/TodaysOutlook/Pages/supply.html>  
<http://www.caiso.com/Documents/MonthlyRenewablesPerformanceReport-Apr2022.html>  
<http://www.caiso.com/Documents/MonthlyRenewablesPerformanceReport-May2022.html>

Thanks for the links, include

2. Line 39 (second column): “we do not include any fuel-based generators because we model scenarios with zero CO2 emissions”. You may find it interesting to see a zero CO2 emission technology powered by natural gas <https://netpower.com>

Noted, modified wording

3. Line 54 (second column): you may refer to the same studies in point number 2 or similar studies.

Thanks. Refer

Methods:  
4. Line 31: it will be better for readers unfamiliar with the copper-plate model to see a sentence or two about how does this work?

Yes, included sentence for copper plate

5. Line 54: it is more accurate to say “onshore wind” instead of “wind.”

Added

Results  
6. Line 58: “While analyzing latitude should be similar to analyzing the solar CF, it is still worthwhile to do this separate analysis.”. I am sorry; I didn’t get what you meant in this sentence. Can you rewrite it to be clear?

Yes, rewritten

7. Figure 5: you may find it interesting if you generate a similar figure for the curtailed electricity.

Will do

8. Figure 7: you may find it interesting if you color these dots by the average latitude for each country

Will do

9. Figure 8: you may find it interesting if you color these dots by the average latitude for each country

Will do

Discussion  
10. Usually, it is better to start the discussion with a more substantial sentence than this one. Please keep the first sentence attractive to the reader as a motivation to continue reading the section. In the first sentence, you can focus on your best results.

Modified discussion section

**Reviewer #2:**

|  |
| --- |
| Dear reviewer #2,  Thank you for your helpful suggestions |

Comments to the Author  
The authors propose the work entitled: "What is the Optimal Electricity Share for Very Inexpensive Solar PV Energy?". The work is compelling and valuable to the community to understand how the cost of solar will change the electricity mix as many countries transition to zero-carbon grids. However, to justify the publication of this manuscript, the authors must expand the literature review as the research question has been explored or addressed in other regions of the world. Therefore, the authors should include this expanded literature and further explain the knowledge gap this work can fill. This version of the manuscript needs major revision for publishing in JPV. These revisions are listed below:

We have added the suggested literature and hope the revisions satisfy

Concerns:  
  
1. As mentioned by the author, the topic is complex and has many variables interacting. The study might benefit or see different results if it analyzed a single country and modeled the capacity additions instead of analyzing a multi-country spatial resolution.

Maybe: only look at single countries, ie no transmission? Would involve new model run

2. It needs to be clarified what period was analyzed using the PyPSA. It is mentioned that it is a yearly resolution, but there is no mention of what year it is.

Clarify year resolution

3. The authors must include or mention which input assumptions and constraints are relevant to the results shown in the manuscript.

Include these

4. The author should include behind-the-meter (BTM) installations or mention why they were not included in the model. BTM systems impact electrical demand, and the number of installations has been growing worldwide. The omission of this kind of system could represent a bias in the results.

How much is this actually?

5. Since the author lists California and Colorado as study locations, a national source for the cost of the technologies should be included since the source reference is only applicable to Europe. The author can look at NREL-ATB for this information and contrast it with its reference.

Understood, change the reference for these places

6. The author should justify why the coefficient of performance for the heat pump was set to 3.

Why not?

7. The units of figure 1 need to be clarified. Please include units on the y-axis.

Include

8. Capacity factors for Solar PV and Wind for both Colorado and California locations are low compared to other references. See <https://windexchange.energy.gov/maps-data/17>. Also, the author should list if these are AC or DC capacity factors.

Check. I knew this at one point

9. While the methodology seems solid overall, the author should further explain the role of energy storage and hydrogen to increase the share of solar further. As mentioned by the author, the model only assumes battery and hydrogen to balance the grid. However, these assets need to be further mentioned in the manuscript on how they help meet the demand or reduce renewable curtailment.

Explains

10. The authors should contrast the heating demand value obtained with other references.

Check other references

11. For the networked sector-coupled model, the author should list the limitations of using the 3-hourly temporal resolution since this can affect the share of renewable generation and energy storage. How does it contrast if an hourly resolution model is used instead?

Lists limitations. Uses hourly

12. Figure 4 needs to clearly show the difference between Wind/electric and Solar /Electric. The figure shows a third greenish color that is not listed in the figure labels.

Change Figure

13. There is a missing Figure reference on line 59.

Fix

14. The references should be checked, and the referring style of this journal should be met.

Checks references

15.The conclusion must be rewritten to include the main metrics and findings obtained. For example, the authors should include the correlation coefficients or the share of solar at the expected price point.

Rewrites conclusion

**Reviewer #2:**

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| --- |
| Dear reviewer #3,  Thank you for your helpful suggestions and comments |

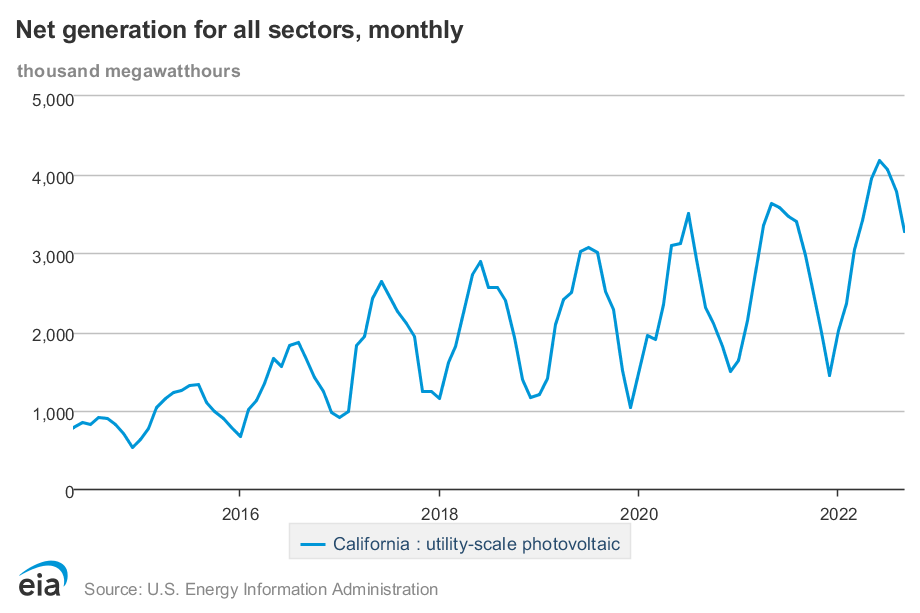
Review of Dvorak & Victoria “What is the Optimal Electricity Share for Very Inexpensive Solar PV Energy?” The paper analyzes the fraction of solar and wind that could be used to meet the electricity demand in selected locations including two studies (one that compares four locations using a single-node model and a second that studies Europe including sector-coupling and transmission). The first study’s results show that the Denmark would use mostly wind and California would use mostly solar regardless of the cost of solar while Spain and Colorado might switch from wind to solar if the price of solar drops low enough. The second study explores the effects of latitude, solar quality, wind quality, transmission and sector coupling on the fraction of solar vs wind finding that sector coupling increases use of solar while transmission increases use of wind while no single variable determined the amount of solar. The overall conclusions are not surprising but provide some insights that some readers may find interesting and useful. However, I was disappointed– this group has published some excellent papers in the past, but this paper I found to be confusing, and I question the accuracy of the data. It needs to be revised before publication.

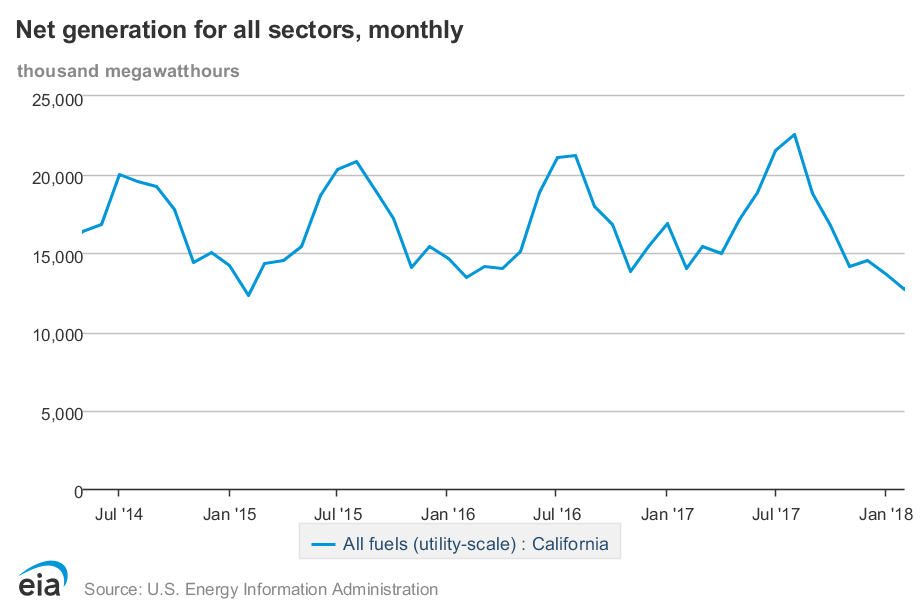
We hope that the revisions have improved the quality of the paper, made less confusing, and verified accuracy of the data

**1. Concerns about data:**

Fig. 1 shows a seasonal variation in solar capacity factor for Denmark, but very little seasonal variation for other locations. This is puzzling because all four locations have longer days during the summer than during the winter. For example, here are EIA data for solar in California showing strong seasonality:

Similarly, the loads are expected to have seasonal variations. Again, here are data for California showing seasonal variation much greater than shown in Fig. 1:





I spent a little time trying to understand how Fig. 1 could suggest data so different from what I would expect – I even went to the sites specified in references 20 and 22, but I found that the data I accessed at those references showed strong seasonality, in contradiction to Fig. 1. Given the dependence of the solar capacity factors on mounting (e.g. tilt and tracking or fixed), it is important that the paper describe what was assumed and it is important that the data be relevant to reality. For example, the annual capacity factor for wind quoted for California is substantially less than what is observed. Is this intentional or accidental?

Checks the annual capacity factor for wind. Possibly run new simulation

One could argue that it is better to average the capacity factor that would be observed if the entire state or country were filled with wind turbines or solar plants, but it is more likely that generators would be built in the best sites rather than uniformly. Using the observed values would, therefore, be more realistic in my opinion than using average simulated data, especially when the simulated data differ so much from observed data.

Use of observed vs simulated data?

If the input data to the calculations are inaccurate, then all of the results are questionable. Thus, this concern about the data needs to be straightened out before the paper can be published. If the data used in the calculations were incorrect, then I expect that the calculations need to be repeated and the paper revised accordingly.

We hope that the verification of the data

**2. Bias in price data:**

The representation of literature price data appear to be biased. For example, “The price of utility scale solar PV in 2020 can be estimated to be 0.529 C/Wp [30], but can also reach up to 1.3 C/Wp [31]. The cost of solar PV is known to vary widely by region [32].” Suggests that 0.529 Euros/Wp is an average price. I tried to understand how this was arrived at: I could not find any mention of this price in reference 30. Reference 31, which is implied by this passage to be on the high end of the price statistics is a study that assessed many data and identified something like a median (not high-end) price, so might be better taken as the “estimated price.”  
The authors note that using the module learning rate for system analysis is inappropriate, which I agree with. The authors conclude “Nevertheless, we plot values up to 0.01 C/Wp as an

academic exercise to better understand what would happen in a universe with extremely cheap solar.” While it is reasonable to plot values outside of a realistic range as an academic exercise, the analysis of the expected price should be accurate and the shaded “Today’s range” and “Future range” regions in Fig. 4 should be objective and consistent with the literature. For example, reference 32, Fig. 3.3 suggests a much wider range for today’s prices.

To me, the focus on unrealistically low prices detracts from the paper. The major conclusions are all found using realistic prices, so why spend time persuading the readers that the authors are biased? It would be a stronger paper without the bias.

Removes the bias

**3. Title and take-away messages:**

It appears to me that the title was selected to reflect the academic exercise of using “Very Inexpensive Solar PV” for answering the important question of “In the future (2050?) what fraction of electricity generation will be from solar?” My first question is whether that’s the useful question to ask. If solar is essentially free so it’s installed at a level that 90% of the electricity is curtailed, what fraction of the land will be covered? There is some value to a purely academic study, but the study would be much more useful if the authors would explore realistic scenarios (this is underscoring my conclusion in the previous paragraph). A second question is whether the title does the paper justice – Fig. 4 shows not only the very inexpensive solar, but a cost range spanning something like a factor of 200 – it seems that the study is broader than the title would suggest. Perhaps the authors would be interested in a title like “Key Determinants of Solar Fraction in Solar- and Wind-Driven Grids”.

Thank you for the suggestion of title

I would also encourage the authors to think about the scope of the paper. I see many ideas mentioned as part of the consideration, but then not treated very well or being confusing. For example:  
4. The authors mention doing analysis of the effects of battery and other costs, but no data are presented.

Redo battery cost analysis

5. I found Fig. 2/3 to be very interesting, but it appears that the heating load has very little effect on the solar-wind ratio. The authors budgeted 2 figures to explaining the calculation of the heating loads, but the effects aren’t discussed in the conclusion.

Now discussed in the conclusion

6. I am puzzled why the authors focus on capacity factor as the quality factor rather than the total potential resource. For example, a small country could have a very large capacity factor reflecting strong wind or cloudless skies, but not enough land to have a large wind and solar potential. I don’t know what to make of the author’s statement “This could help explain why the simple model shows CA to be so solar dominated and CO to be more balanced–it is not that CA has better solar than CO, but worse wind.” since the capacity factor observed for wind in CA is greater than that for solar (though the potential is less because the high capacity factor is found in some sites, but not everywhere.

Check capacity factor of wind. Verify difference between potential and capacity factor

7. If the overall goal of the paper is to identify the (key?) factors that might affect the solar fraction and when each contributes, it could be useful to the reader to have a table of all of the factors and then comment on the effect that each one has and how it varies depending on the situation. The authors already do this to some extent, but I found that there was lengthy discussion of some things that I thought were obvious and then no discussion of some other factors. The paper would be stronger if the scope and major takeaways were better defined and then presented consistently throughout the paper. A specific example is how the title currently suggests that only very low cost solar will be considered, but the paper actually documents the effect of variable cost. The title and abstract will help the reader understand the paper by defining the scope precisely.

Rewrite abstract and title to define the scope

More detailed comments

1. Throughout, the authors talk about the “less optimistic” and “optimistic” prices. Table 1

specifies the costs that were used in the calculations, so should also include these, in my

opinion.

Rewrites conclusion

1. It seems strange that the efficiency of the batteries is not specified.

Specifies battery efficiency

1. Some of the lettering in the figures is too small to be seen. Also, the colors used are

difficult to distinguish in Fig. 6.

Improves Figure. Change color

1. I don’t understand how the colors are assigned to the regions in Fig. 4 – I can see three

regions, but the legend specifies four regions and I can’t see four colors.

Change the colors

1. I realize that it’s not possible for every detail of this sort of modeling be specified, but I

would appreciate seeing the following details added: a) definition of sector coupling (section B. of the methods section just gives a reference) and b) I’m not clear on the assumptions for the space heating. It says “To estimate the total heating demand, we assume that the percentage of household heating demand of the total is the same as that of the electricity demand.” Could you clarify this – I could better understand something like “Effectively, this assumes that all residential and commercial natural gas furnaces and hot water heaters are replaced by heat pumps.” Having this sort of useful perspective would be helpful both to supplement the cryptic “We use heating data from Victoria et al. for Denmark and Spain.” (with no reference number) and “...scale the timeseries to match the annual energy demand for space heating [26].”

Adds definition of sector coupling, improve space heating assumptions.