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**Comunicación:**

**GAS COMPANIES IN THE ELECTRICITY SECTOR IN SPAIN AND  
FRANCE, BETWEEN LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY<sup>1</sup>**

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Since late-19<sup>th</sup> Century, gas companies faced the competition of electricity produced at an industrial scale. It was then necessary to think of different strategies. State governments and municipal administrations were against monopolistic property by gas companies. The latter started lawsuits to avoid the entrance of electricity companies into the energy market. They started technological innovations to improve the quality of the gas produced and to low its cost down. Moreover, advertising campaigns were designed in order to attract new clients and increase gas consume, above all in lighting. At the same time, they carried out a company concentration process, and most of them decided to participate in the electricity sector, too. That is, they tried to stop new electric companies from entering the energy market by devoting themselves to electricity production, a strategy that deserves all the attention of the historiography about the gas industry.

In this paper, we aim at studying the issue for the first time in Spain and France, since the 1890s till the 1920s. During those decades municipal administrations granted the companies the authorisation to provide the cities with gas and electricity. And French investments were crucial in the start of gas industry in Spain. Therefore, it is a key period

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for the history of gas companies, as by late-19<sup>th</sup> Century electric companies had become their true competitors. Hence, most gas companies decided to start producing electricity, too. The trend consolidated by early-20<sup>th</sup> Century, when electric companies proved capable of providing the people with hydroelectricity at a major scale and low prices.

Gas companies went into a dramatic crisis during the First World War, as a consequence of scarcity and high prices of coal, needed for producing gas. They lost the battle for providing light to the people. However, in the Interwar Years they recovered, increasing the number of clients for domestic and industrial consume, though in many cases they still went on participating in the electric sector, or they even reached agreements with electric companies. We will identify the companies that participated in the electric sector, too, focusing on when they did it and how they did it, underlining the example of Lebon et Cie., which provided gas to Spain and France. It will be also necessary to compare its sales in gas and electricity, as well as the number of subscribers, to evaluate the relevance of both industrial sectors in the aforementioned period.

The main goal of this research is to analyse the way the gas companies started and continued their activity in the electric sector, in Spain and France, as a response to the competition of electric companies.

Our hypothesis is that most gas companies decided to enter the electric sector, which grew a lot until the 1920s. For this reason, it was required to create and enlarge the infrastructure for producing electricity and providing the people with it, to by the electric companies, and in some cases to reach agreements with them.

We will carry out an analytic-descriptive study in order to test our hypothesis. A comparative methodology will be essential to study the activity of French and Spanish gas companies, namely Lebon et Cie.

We will use different sources: statistics from gas private and public companies, archival material from state institutions and private companies, and secondary sources, too.

The main research areas that we cover in this research are: Companies, Gas, Electricity, Electric Companies, and Competition.

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