

# A Perspective on Neutrino Physics

## By Members of the Spanish Neutrino Physics Community

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## 1. Motivation and perspectives

- The discovery of neutrino masses in the last decade by means of several neutrino oscillation experiments has unveiled a new flavor sector. It has therefore become necessary to introduce new fundamental parameters into the Standard Model (SM), corresponding to neutrino masses, leptonic mixing angles and new CP violating phases.
- We still do not know what is the Standard Model extension ( $\nu$ SM, in the following) responsible for neutrino masses. What we do know is that it requires adding new degrees of freedom to the theory.
- The simplest model (Dirac neutrinos) requires the addition of fermionic singlets and a new global symmetry (lepton number). In this case, the  $\nu$ SM involves three mixing angles (which have been measured already), three masses (whose differences are known, but not their absolute values nor their ordering<sup>2</sup>), and one CP violating phase (yet to be measured). Recent global analyses favor, albeit with a low ( $< 2\sigma$ ) statistical significance, a negative CP violating phase. This result demonstrates the complementarity of appearance and disappearance measurements, as well as the existing synergy between atmospheric, reactor and accelerator-based neutrino experiments.
- The highly hierarchical pattern of fermion masses, with neutrinos being much lighter than quarks and charged leptons, could be naturally explained if neutrinos were Majorana particles. In this case, the  $\nu$ SM would necessarily be more complex, as it would involve the presence of a new physics scale lying somewhere between the electroweak and the grand unification scale.
- The observation of neutrinoless double decay would unambiguously prove the Majorana character of neutrinos and the existence of this new physics scale. For this reason, neutrinoless double beta decay is considered a key process to search for. Given that the amplitude for such a process greatly depends on whether the neutrino mass ordering is normal or inverted, the experimental determination of the latter is also of crucial importance.
- Moreover, Majorana neutrino models imply, generically, the generation of an asymmetry between matter and antimatter as the Universe evolves, as required by observations. While obtaining an accurate prediction for this asymmetry is a complicated task, two basic ingredients are needed that require experimental confirmation: 1) CP violation in the lepton sector and 2) lepton number violation.
- It is also possible that the new physics scale responsible for neutrino masses is below the electroweak scale. While this scale would not provide a natural explanation for

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<sup>2</sup>The mass ordering can be either normal, in which case the two lightest states are the most degenerate, or inverted, with the two heaviest states being the most degenerate.

the existing hierarchy between neutrino and other fermion masses, it would imply the existence of new light states (e.g. sterile neutrinos). These new states can be searched for via neutrino oscillations, meson decays, or lepton number violating processes such as  $\mu \rightarrow e\gamma$ . Furthermore, they could play an important role for dark matter, for the baryon asymmetry in the Universe and for cosmological anomalies (in particular, the fact that fits to cosmological data prefer, marginally, more than three light neutrino species).

- The impact of neutrino physics extends beyond the above-mentioned particle physics perspective. Natural sources of neutrinos exist at the cosmological, astrophysical and terrestrial scales, opening the possibility for interdisciplinary studies between particle physics, nuclear physics, cosmology, astrophysics and geophysics.

## 2. The Spanish community in neutrino physics

As far as theoretical physics is concerned, there are several Spanish groups with a well-established track record in neutrino physics and related fields. In particular, world experts in the following areas exist in Spain:

- Global fits of neutrino oscillation data and extraction of the neutrino mass matrix fundamental parameters.
- Neutrino oscillation phenomenology in future experiments to measure the neutrino mass ordering and leptonic CP violation. Most of this activity has been carried out in a European and international context, contributing in a significant way to projects such as ISS, EURONU, IDS-NF, LAGUNA, etc.
- Calculation of neutrino-nucleon and neutrino-nucleus interaction cross sections, a necessary ingredient to reduce systematic uncertainties in neutrino oscillation experiments.
- Calculation of the nuclear matrix elements involved in neutrinoless double beta decay.
- Neutrinos in astrophysics and cosmology.
- Neutrino mass models and associated phenomenology.

Concerning experimental physics, Spanish groups have contributed in a significant way to leading international experiments in neutrino physics:

- Neutrino oscillation experiments: NOMAD (CERN), K2K (Japan), MiniBooNE (Fermilab). At present, several groups participate in the Double Chooz (France), T2K (Japan) and Super-Kamiokande (Japan) neutrino oscillation experiments.

- Experiments to better understand systematic uncertainties affecting neutrino oscillation data, such as the hadron production experiment HARP (CERN) and the neutrino scattering experiment SciBooNE (Fermilab).
- Experiments searching for neutrinoless double beta decay: NEXT (Canfranc Underground Laboratory, Spain). NEXT is an international collaboration with important contributions from USA, Portugal, Colombia and Russia.
- Study and design optimization of detectors for future neutrino experiments, such as the ones to be used in conjunction with a Neutrino Factory: MIND, in the framework of the EURONU and LAGUNA-LBNO projects.
- Neutrino telescopes: ANTARES (France) and KM3NeT.

### 3. Strategic experiments

In order to achieve significant progress in our understanding of neutrino physics and its implications, the following questions should be answered:

- Is lepton number violated?
- Is there leptonic CP violation?
- What is the neutrino mass ordering, normal or inverted?
- How many additional degrees of freedom are required by the  $\nu$ SM, and what are they?
- Is there a new physics scale associated to such additional degrees of freedom? What is this scale?
- Why is the mixing pattern of leptons so different from the quark one?

It is not guaranteed that we will find answers to all of these questions, but there are key experiments needed to search for them.

#### 3.1. Majorana neutrinos, or a new physics scale

The observation of neutrinoless double beta decay would imply that neutrinos are Majorana particles (and therefore that a new physics scale must exist) and that total lepton number is not a good symmetry of Nature. In addition, a measurement of the rate of this process would provide a new observable that is sensitive to the absolute scale of neutrino masses and to the Majorana CP phases. Based on the current knowledge of neutrino masses and mixing parameters, we already know that neutrinoless double beta decay experiments must

be close to the detection of a positive signal, provided neutrinos are Majorana particles and the neutrino mass ordering is inverted <sup>3</sup>.

On the other hand, in order to fully cover the allowed parameter space, even for the inverted ordering case, a factor of 100 improvement in sensitivity for the half-life of this process is necessary, compared to the current sensitivity. A new generation of experiments is required to this end, with typical masses of order 1000 kg, and background reduction factors of order 100 compared to background levels currently achieved.

Historically, neutrinoless double beta decay experiments have used a calorimetric technique based on germanium detectors, with outstanding energy resolution. The current generation germanium experiments are GERDA and MAJORANA. GERDA is currently taking data with a 18 kg active mass and is planning for a second phase with about 40 kg detector mass, similar to the planned mass of the MAJORANA demonstrator. The two collaborations have presented a joint proposal for a ton-scale germanium detector. The main challenges to be met in order to prove the feasibility of a ton-scale germanium detector are: (i) a background reduction to the  $10^{-3}/(\text{keV}\cdot\text{kg}\cdot\text{yr})$  level or better, and (ii) a cost-effective way to procure ton-scale amounts of isotopically <sup>76</sup>Ge-enriched germanium.

An alternative approach relies on natural tellurium, which is in principle easier to procure in large amounts. This is the technique to be employed by the CUORE experiment now under construction. However, it remains to be demonstrated that this approach can be more easily extrapolated to large masses than the germanium technique.

The most promising alternative approach already capable of reaching  $O(100\text{ kg})$  active masses relies on xenon. Isotopically <sup>136</sup>Xe-enriched xenon is much cheaper than germanium, and therefore easier to obtain in large quantities. The best sensitivity to the neutrinoless double beta decay process has recently been obtained by the EXO experiment, using a liquid xenon TPC. Despite having an energy resolution that is a factor of 20 worse than the germanium detectors one, EXO achieves a reduction in the background per unit mass and energy of at least a factor of 10 compared to germanium, thanks to the possibility of defining an inner fiducial volume.

In Spain, the NEXT experiment is building a high-pressure xenon gas TPC. Compared to its liquid form, xenon gas should achieve a better (by a factor 5–10) energy resolution and a stronger (also by a factor 5–10) reduction in the background level per unit mass and energy, thanks to the possibility of detecting the topological signature of the two electrons emitted in the decay. For this reason, we believe that this is the most promising technique to be extrapolated to large masses.

During its first phase, NEXT-100, the detector will employ 100/150 kg of <sup>136</sup>Xe-enriched xenon. Given that the EXO sensitivity is limited by backgrounds, NEXT-100 can potentially achieve a better sensitivity than EXO. Furthermore, NEXT-100 would represent a crucial

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<sup>3</sup>We assume in this case that the new physics scale is above 100 MeV. If that is not the case, additional contributions to the neutrinoless double beta decay process must be taken into account as well, modifying this expectation.

step toward the extrapolation of this technique to the ton-scale.

Likewise, it is important to note that the topological information of the decay electrons is potentially of great importance even if neutrinoless double beta decay is discovered via calorimetric techniques. The reason is that it may be possible in this case to measure the individual electron energies, thus providing valuable information for understanding the dominant mechanism responsible for such decay process.

### **3.2. Neutrino oscillation physics: flavor physics in the lepton sector**

Two fundamental measurements remain to be done: the measurement of the neutrino mass ordering, and the leptonic CP phase(s) measurement. As such, these are the top priorities of future neutrino oscillation experiments. On the other hand, it would also be extremely valuable to improve the accuracy on the already measured parameters, in order to achieve a precision level that is similar to the quark sector level. To this end, it appears that significant room for improvement still exists, especially via current reactor neutrino experiments and their possible upgrades. In particular, the proposed Daya Bay II experiment, with a neutrino baseline of about 60 km, could measure the  $\theta_{12}$  mixing angle and the solar and atmospheric neutrino mass differences with a precision of order 1%. The possibility to measure the neutrino mass ordering in Daya Bay II, by measuring the interference between the solar and atmospheric oscillations, is also under investigation. However, this appears to be a difficult measurement to perform, and no consensus currently exists on whether this is achievable or not.

#### **3.2.1. Measurement of the neutrino mass ordering**

The measurement of the neutrino mass ordering is a fundamental ingredient for predicting other observables, such as the amplitude of the neutrinoless double beta decay process, or the effective neutrino mass in tritium  $\beta$  decay.

This measurement would be very easy to carry out with a conventional  $\nu_\mu$  beam and a detector searching for  $\nu_e$  appearance at large distances, thanks to the impressive MSW resonant effect expected in either neutrinos or antineutrinos (depending on the neutrino mass ordering) at  $\sim 6$  GeV neutrino energies. Nonetheless, the MSW effect is significant also for lower-energy neutrinos. The NOvA experiment, currently under construction, will be the first one to have some sensitivity to the neutrino mass ordering. However, because of its short baseline and its low energy beam, an unambiguous result is expected for only part of the entire parameter space allowed.

The neutrino mass ordering can be inferred also via precision measurements of atmospheric neutrinos. This approach appears more feasible since the recent measurement of a relatively large  $\theta_{13}$  mixing angle.

Three experiments have been proposed: 1) INO (India) will measure the muon flux with a magnetized iron calorimeter, allowing to separate  $\mu^+$  from  $\mu^-$ ; 2) Hyper-Kamiokande (Japan),

based on the same detection technique as Super-Kamiokande, but 20 times more massive; 3) both the IceCube and ANTARES/KM3Net collaborations are making plans toward smaller, but more densely instrumented, regions to measure the atmospheric neutrino flux in the several GeV energy region. The physics potential of these two proposals, PINGU and ORCA, is still under investigation, but the prospects are promising.

It is possible that none of the options described above will be able to measure the neutrino mass ordering. Even in this case, such a measurement should be very easy to carry out with the new-generation conventional neutrino beams operating at energies closer to the MSW resonance (that is, with higher neutrino energies and longer baselines compared to NOvA). We discuss these options in the following.

### 3.2.2. Measurement of leptonic CP violation

The measurement of CP violation is not possible in reactor neutrino experiments, given that an appearance measurement is required in this case. The best appearance channel is the same as the one for determining the neutrino mass ordering:  $\nu_\mu \leftrightarrow \nu_e$ . The first experiments with some sensitivity to CP violation will be T2K and NOvA. It is in principle possible to discover CP violation at  $\sim 3\sigma$  significance in a small region of the allowed parameter space, by combining both datasets. Even if with small significance, a positive result in T2K+NOvA would imply a close-to-maximal CP phase.

In order to do better, significant improvements with respect to the current experiments are needed. The sensitivity to CP violation (under the assumption that statistical uncertainties dominate) is maximal when the ratio between the neutrino energy  $E$  and the distance (or baseline)  $L$  between neutrino production and detection point,  $E/L$ , is of order of the atmospheric neutrino mass splitting. Furthermore, for this  $E/L$  value, the CP violation sensitivity is maximized for  $L \sim 700 - 1000$  km. However, the optimal baseline for the measurement of the neutrino mass ordering is larger, so that the best compromise for an experiment aiming to measure both quantities is around 1000 km.

The recent  $\theta_{13}$  measurement has important implications, allowing a measurement of the CP phase via very intense conventional neutrino beams. However, the sensitivity of this type of experiments is ultimately limited by systematic uncertainties (neutrino cross sections and neutrino beam understanding). The current experimental landscape has been recently summarized in the contributions to the Open Symposium of the European Strategy Preparatory Group (<http://indico.cern.ch/conferenceDisplay.py?confId=175067>), and is the following:

- Using conventional beams:

Three proposals have been put forward recently: LBNE (Fermilab-Homestake), LBNO (CERN-Phyäsalmi) and T2HK (Tokai-Kamioka). The first two proposals plan to use similar neutrino beams and similar detectors (in both cases a liquid argon detector is foreseen), and are expected to have comparable sensitivities to the neutrino mass

ordering and to CP violation. The LBNE proposal plans to use a shorter baseline, allowing for a more sensitive CP violation search. During a first phase, the two proposals would use 10 and 20 kton detectors, respectively. Such detectors would be sufficient to unambiguously measure the neutrino mass ordering, but would have limited sensitivity to CP violation. We believe that it is necessary to make every effort in order to achieve larger detector masses, by a factor 3–5, especially if it turns out that the neutrino mass ordering can be measured on a shorter timescale via atmospheric neutrino experiments.

The Japanese proposal plans to expose the Hyper-Kamiokande detector, which will also measure atmospheric neutrinos, to the T2K beam. The neutrino mass ordering sensitivity of this proposal is entirely driven by atmospheric neutrinos, but its CP violation sensitivity is expected to be very good thanks to its large statistical power (detector mass of about 500 kton).

Ideas that are similar to Hyper-Kamiokande have been discussed in Europe as well, based on a beam produced at the SPL and contemplating CERN-Fréjus (130 km) or CERN-Canfranc (650 km) baselines. Another idea that has been discussed more recently involves producing a neutrino beam at the European Spallation Source (ESS) in Lund. These projects have not yet produced a EoI/LoI.

Given the long timescales required to build such projects (about 10 years) and the likely possibility that joint analyses of previous experiments will provide information on the neutrino mass ordering, we stress that it is essential that they are able to reach a significant sensitivity to CP violation.

- Using advanced beams:

An accuracy in the CP phase measurement that is similar to the one achieved in the quark sector would require better understood neutrino beams. An example of such a beam is that resulting from muon-decay at a Neutrino Factory, whose flavor composition and energy spectrum are known very precisely. In this case, systematic uncertainties can be kept small, also because it is possible to measure the relevant neutrino cross sections in a near detector. In this case, the signal is given by muons rather than electrons (as was the case for conventional neutrino beams), which is easier in the few GeV energy range. Given the measured value of  $\theta_{13}$ , an optimal configuration may be that of a low-energy Neutrino Factory (LENF), based on 10 GeV stored muons and a 2000 km baseline.

Unlike for conventional neutrino beams, significant R&D is still required to build a Neutrino Factory. To this end, the MICE experiment and the new proposal nuSTORM represent important steps forward. In particular, nuSTORM would be a minimalistic LENS allowing to test the LSND anomaly with a completely different and well understood neutrino beam. Moreover, nuSTORM is the only realistic proposal to measure  $\nu_e$  cross sections, which are potentially the largest source of systematic uncertainty in



Experiment	Baseline (km)	Timescale	Mass Ordering	$\Delta\delta(^{\circ})$	CP Fraction
NOVA+T2K	290/810	+10y	$<2-3\sigma$		-
LBNE (10kton)	1300	$\sim 10y+10y$	$\sim 5\sigma$	$< 33^{\circ}$	-
LBNO (20kton)	2300	$\sim 10y+10y$	$>5\sigma$	$< 34^{\circ}$	-
T2HK	290	$\sim 10y+10y$	$\sim 4\sigma$	$< 15^{\circ}$	$\sim [50\%-70\%]$
LBNE (34kton)	1300	?+10y	$\gg 5\sigma$	$< 20^{\circ}$	$\sim 56\%$
LBNO (100kton)	2300	?+10y	$\gg 5\sigma$	$< 15^{\circ}$	$\sim 59\%$
SPL	130/630	?+10y	$-/3\sigma$	$\leq 16^{\circ}/26^{\circ}$	$\sim 55\%/\sim 70\%$
ESS	400	?+10y	$3 - 4\sigma$	$< 20^{\circ}$	$\sim 70\%$
LENF	2300	?+10y	$> 5\sigma$	$\leq 7^{\circ}$	$\sim 85\%$

Table 1: Comparison of the significance achieved for the neutrino mass ordering determination, of the  $1\sigma$  error on the measurement of the CP phase  $\delta$ , and of the CP fraction permitting to measure a  $\delta$  value different from  $0, \pi$  at  $3\sigma$ . The CP measurement assumes prior knowledge of the neutrino mass ordering. The range given in the CP fraction covered by T2HK is meant to quantify the impact of systematic uncertainties. The NOVA+T2K, LBNE (10 kton) and LBNO (20 kton) experiments have no sensitivity to the discovery of CP violation at  $3\sigma$ . The table also gives the neutrino baseline as well as the estimated timescale for construction plus the assumed data-taking period. Results presented at the European Strategy Preparatory Group.

future conventional neutrino beam experiments.

A comparison of the sensitivity of all these experiments is shown in Tab. ??.

### 3.2.3. The number of neutrino species and neutrino anomalies

The famous LSND anomaly (which has not been conclusively excluded by the MiniBooNE experiment) and the new reactor neutrino anomaly can be interpreted in terms of new, sterile, neutrino species. Even though sterile neutrino models do not provide a very good description of all the data, the possible existence of additional neutrinos would be of great interest from the theoretical point of view (since it would imply that a new physics scale exists below the electroweak scale) and would have important implications for other neutrino observables.

Several experiments have been proposed to unambiguously settle this issue. On the one hand, the Double Chooz, Daya Bay and RENO reactor neutrino experiments should be in a position to clarify the reactor neutrino anomaly on a short timescale.

On the other hand, several proposals exist to improve on the MiniBooNE sensitivity and clarify the LSND anomaly: ICARUS-NESSiE at CERN, MicroBooNE at Fermilab and nuSTORM. The latter has a clear advantage as it uses a very well understood beam, allowing for a better control of systematic uncertainties. For example, nuSTORM should be able to exclude the LSND allowed region at the  $\sim 10\sigma$  confidence level. Another very interesting idea is based on the deployment of radioactive sources within the Borexino detector, in order to study the reactor neutrino anomaly.

### 3.3. Neutrinos in cosmology

Currently, the absolute neutrino mass scale can only be determined via  $\beta$  decay experiments, experiments searching for neutrinoless double beta decay, or via cosmological data. The first two techniques are sensitive to a combination of mixing angles and neutrino masses (and also phases, in the neutrinoless double beta decay case). On the other hand, cosmology is sensitive to the total energy density of the Universe in the form of massive neutrinos, that is to say, to the sum of neutrino masses. Neutrino masses have a big impact on the evolution of matter perturbations or on structure formation. Also, CMB and BBN are very sensitive to the number of relativistic neutrinos (e.g., to the number of active plus sterile neutrinos).

A recent analysis of BOSS data on the distribution of galaxies at large scales, in conjunction with WMAP cosmic microwave background data, has provided an upper limit on the sum of neutrino masses of  $\sum m_\nu < 0.26$  eV at 95% CL (with a significant dependence, however, on the cosmological model assumed and on the size of the systematic uncertainties affecting structure formation). In the future, more data from the BOSS experiment and its upgrades (eBOSS, Big-BOSS) could largely improve this limit. It is important to note that the BOSS analyses on the neutrino mass constraints have been led precisely by the small Spanish contingent within the collaboration.

Future CMB data from the PLANCK experiment, in combination with BOSS data, will allow to measure the number of relativistic species with great accuracy. According to Monte Carlo simulations, PLANCK data should provide uncertainties of  $\sim 0.1$ , 0.11 and 0.14 on this quantity if the number of additional relativistic species at decoupling (that is, the number of sterile neutrinos) is 1, 2 and 3, respectively.

Cosmological experiments will provide information that is both complementary to the one provided by terrestrial neutrino experiments, and extremely valuable to understand the origin of neutrino mass.

## 4. Conclusions

From all of the above, we reach the following conclusions concerning a future strategy for neutrino physics in Spain.

- The contribution of Spanish groups to neutrino phenomenology has been, and still is, of great scientific impact. The support to this contribution should be maintained. Neutrino physics will be crucial to understand the open questions in particle physics.
- The NEXT experiment can play a very important role in the search for neutrinoless double beta decay, given its projected performance compared to the leading international projects in the field, and for the promising prospects offered by the xenon gas technique to reach large masses. Furthermore, NEXT is a strategic experiment for the Canfranc Underground Laboratory, and as such its progress is reviewed by a first-class international scientific committee. For these reasons, we believe that NEXT should be supported.
- The support to the Spanish contribution to the T2K experiment should be maintained, given that this experiment will be the first one with some sensitivity to leptonic CP violation. The Spanish contribution to Super-Kamiokande is important and should also be supported, considering that the study of atmospheric neutrinos can still provide valuable information to measure the neutrino mass ordering and CP violation, especially if combined with T2K and NOvA.
- In the longer term, a Spanish contribution to accelerator-based neutrino experiments providing better neutrino mass ordering and CP violation sensitivity reach would be important. Among the existing proposals based on conventional neutrino beams, the HK-T2HK proposal is the one with the strongest physics case. On the one hand, it would allow to study atmospheric neutrinos with much better statistical accuracy than the one currently achieved. On the other hand, it could detect neutrinos from the T2K beam (or from an upgraded beam) to perform a very sensitive CP violation search. Also, this appears as a natural option given the Spanish involvement in T2K and SK. In principle, it would be interesting to support a European project. However, the current proposal (LBNO, 20 kton) has a weaker physics case. In order to be as competitive as T2HK, the LBNO detector mass should be increased by a factor 3–5. The same arguments apply to the LBNE (10kton) proposal.
- The PINGU/ORCA proposals to study atmospheric neutrinos using neutrino telescopes appear very promising, as they could provide an enormous statistical power and perhaps also a first measurement of the neutrino mass ordering. The sensitivity studies for both experiments have not been completed yet, and it is therefore premature to quantify their impact. Nonetheless, if it turns out that a measurement of the neutrino mass ordering is indeed possible with more densely-instrumented neutrino telescopes, we suggest, given the Spanish presence in ANTARES, to support the Spanish contribution to ORCA.
- A Neutrino Factory could obtain a much more accurate measurement of the CP phase, compared to conventional neutrino beams. For this reason, a Neutrino Factory would be

a natural option for a second-generation experiment. The recently proposed nuSTORM experiment would be an important step forward in the necessary R&D, and would have an interesting physics case (test of the LSND anomaly and measurement of  $\nu_e$  cross sections). In this context, a Spanish contribution to the far detector, SuperBIND, would be natural. SuperBIND would in fact be a prototype for the MIND detector, whose concept has been largely developed by Spanish groups.

- The small Spanish participation in galaxy survey experiments such as BOSS and future upgrades (eBOSS, Big-BOSS) should be supported, given the importance of these measurements for neutrino physics.