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Abstract Submission for

SESSION 16: LOCAL INNOVATION IMPULSES AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ENERGY SYSTEM

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**Title: Local Initiatives as Drivers for Change? Actor and space- specific Field Formations in German Energy Regions**

Important technical and institutional innovations for energy transitions were and are being developed, tested, and brought to application on local levels. The objective of this paper therefore is to analyze the action of local Initiatives as so called “challenger actors”, who establish specific structural and organizational designs of regionally located governance in the field of energy transitions.

Research is based on a comparative case study research design, using primarily expert interviews and document analysis as data sources. The cases demonstrate that sustainable energy transitions are driven forward by a variety of actors with different aims and interests, culminating in the development of space-specific technological mixes and situative governance structures. Sustainable energy transitions are not following a master plan or are coordinated on a national level.

According to the theory of strategic action fields (Fligstein/McAdam 2011, 2012) the requirements for structural changes are depending on a collective construction of threat or opportunity as a starting point of organizational appropriation depending on actors violating field rules with respect to acceptable practices and engaging in “innovative action” in defense or support of group interests. So called Challenger actors are able to sense an opportunity to use new methods to advance their position in the field and are thus likely to engage in innovative action and sustain mobilization. Then they slowly begin to institutionalize new practices and rules and use opportunities of intentionally bringing forward deeper structural change.