

Anna Schreuer

The establishment of citizen power plants in Austria: A process of empowerment?

This paper looks at citizen power plants in Austria – wind farms and photovoltaics plants jointly owned and operated by groups of citizens – and asks whether their establishment can be interpreted as a process of empowerment. To this end I draw on resource-based notions of power, understanding empowerment as the increase of disadvantaged actors' ability to mobilize and use resources for their goals. I argue that the establishment of citizen power plants constitutes a process of successive resource mobilization in which bottom-up actors have been able to access an increasing amount of resources. At first sight this suggests that the establishment of citizen power plants in Austria indeed constitutes a process of empowerment. However, I also discuss three qualifications to such an interpretation. Firstly, the modulation of ends to which resources are put (assimilation and incorporation to established structures); secondly, the persistence of dependency relations for resource access; and thirdly, a bias of citizen power plant initiatives towards already better-resourced individuals and communities.