

Abstract for

Special Session 2: Energy systems in transition – strategies of incumbent actors

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Conflicts over the extension of the German electricity grid

Among the major players in German energy politics exists a broad consensus that one important condition for the change to renewable energies (RES) is, to expand the electricity transmission grid. The largest share of RES is produced in the north, especially wind power. The excess energy should supply the industrial centers in the west and south of Germany. Therefore new grid capacity is required. More than 7,000 km of new or extended power routes are planned, generally as overhead lines. But the implementation stagnates. One important reason is the widespread activities of citizens' initiatives who protest against the building of overhead lines. These initiatives are supported by environmental organizations, scientists, municipal councils and politicians at the local, regional and federal level.

The dispute over grid expansion has been playing a significant role in the public agenda for years. Somehow the incumbent actors - policy-makers and transmission grid operators - had to respond to the protests and demands. The first question to be discussed in the proposed paper is: In which ways do the "incumbents" do react? Understanding grid extension as a strategic action field (Fligstein/McAdam 2012), in which the actors try to improve or defend their position, further questions are becoming of relevance: In how far do the incumbents manage to defend the old order and their dominant position in the field? What conclusions can be drawn for assessing the development of the field?

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