

STS Conference Graz 2014

“Critical Issues in Science and Technology Studies”

GRAZ, AUSTRIA, May 05-06, 2014

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

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Abstract

German incumbents' strategy of legitimating fossil power plants

With the German government's very ambitious development targets for renewables and the ultimate nuclear phase-out in 2011, incumbents were increasingly searching for ways to legitimate their future existence.

Firstly they searched for arguments in order to question the legitimation of renewables. They stressed that with a high share of intermittent renewables in the electricity mix, the security of electricity supplies in Germany would be threatened. In return they tried to demonstrate that as long as the German electricity system would not offer enough storage capacities, flexible conventional power plants were still needed. Hence conventional plants were framed as an important backbone of the German energy transition.

Secondly they attempted to establish new regulative mechanisms designed to subsidize flexible power plants. Background was, that due to the fact that electricity demand during peak hours was increasingly supplied with electricity from intermittent renewables, flexible conventional power plants, which had been traditionally used to serve peak hours, came up to sale increasingly rarely. For this reason incumbents pleaded for the establishment of "capacity markets" where not only the amount of electricity but also guaranteed capacities are rewarded. Otherwise, they claimed, investments into flexible power plants would be forestalled and the security of electricity supplies threatened.