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Energy Conservation and Electricity Sector Liberalisation: towards a Green and Competitive Electricity Supply?

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Publication date
1999

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Citation for published version (APA):

Slingerland, S. (1999). *Energy Conservation and Electricity Sector Liberalisation: towards a Green and Competitive Electricity Supply?*

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Preface

'Looking beyond the meter' is a slogan frequently employed by utilities that want to engage in energy conservation activities at the end-user level. It is meant to give a description of what utilities need to do if they want to stimulate an efficient use of electricity – but simultaneously it provides a perfect summary of what this research project has been to me.

After a graduation in chemistry at Leiden University I gained a general background in environmental sciences in a post-graduate course in Cambridge. During this education I got acquainted with some chemical and physical aspects of electricity, but I had never paid much attention to what happened at the 'other' side of the electricity meter. It was only during my PhD at the University of Amsterdam that I discovered a new and, as it turned out, presently highly turbulent and exciting world of electricity. The dissertation therefore aims to take readers to this 'other' side of the meter, and to investigate what are the consequences for the end-user side.

This excursion beyond the electricity meter would not have been possible without the help of many people. I would like to thank all interviewees, the respondents to the questionnaire, the referees of the magazines in which the articles were published, as well as all those that provided me with information about the electricity sectors in the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom.

Furthermore all those working at the IVAM in the period 1994-1999 provided me with a stimulating environment to conduct research. Tuesday's coffee session turned out to be an essential instrument for social cohesion in general, and to evaluate the university's reorganisation policies in particular. Nanda and Jeroen, as they shared the same room with me, had to listen to too many wacky phone-calls abroad. Paulien sometimes had to endure my impatience when things did not go as expected. Egbert and Maarten showed me in many, from time to time exhausting, but mostly fruitful conversations how to conduct independent social scientific research.

The help of my family and friends was also very important for me. The care and advice of my parents in particular was essential in completing this project. Also, Heike once again provided a professional lay-out. Conducting research, finally, is always a social process. Maite showed me that sometimes it can have unexpected and happy private consequences.

Amsterdam, August 1999
Stephan Slingerland