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

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Publication date
1999

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Slingerland, S. (1999). *Energy Conservation and Electricity Sector Liberalisation: towards a Green and Competitive Electricity Supply?* [Thesis, fully internal, Milieukunde, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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1. Introduction

At the turn of the century, two fundamental trends determine the future of electricity sectors world-wide. Firstly, in many countries a huge reorganisation process has started which is often referred to as 'liberalisation', or 'deregulation', of the electricity sector. Its main aim is to reshape the previously monopoly based electricity sector into a competitive arena in which suppliers and generators of electricity have to compete for customers. Proponents of liberalisation argue that the introduction of competition between organisations in the electricity sector will lead to societal benefits, which are to be reflected in lower overall electricity prices.

Several countries, like the United Kingdom, Norway, New Zealand and some federal states in Australia and the United States have already created such a competitive market. In the European Union, in 1996 a directive has been adopted that aims at creating one internal market for electricity in several steps from 1999 to 2007. In the years to come all EU member states will have to create the legal conditions that allow parties to compete for customers. Beyond the European Union context, many other countries are considering to liberalise their electricity sectors as well.

A second global trend that is important for the future of electricity sectors is the increasing attention paid to environmental degradation. Spurred by the first oil crisis and the alarming 'Limits to Growth' report published by the Club of Rome in the seventies, the initial focuspoint of this interest was resource depletion. In the late nineties, environmental attention has shifted - via acidification and ozone depletion - to global warming. It is now perceived that the human emission of greenhouse gases contributes to global climate change, with resulting adverse effects to the environment to include sea-level rise, instability of climate and loss of biodiversity.

Concern about environmental degradation has already induced a substantial 'greening' of electricity sectors in recent decades. In the slipstream of the attention for global warming however, energy conservation at present is meeting renewed interest.

Research Objectives

The project outlined in this dissertation is part of a larger research programme in which the influence of electricity and waste sector structures on source reduction initiatives is examined (Tellegen, 1989). Another part of this programme is a concurrent PhD research project on the organisational structure of the waste sector (Jong, 1999).

Overall aim of the research project outlined in this thesis is to examine the relationship between the liberalisation process and the development of energy conservation options. To what extent electricity sector liberalisation and energy conservation can be reconciled is the fundamental question that is discussed in this dissertation.

Outline of the Thesis

Six individually published papers form the backbone of this thesis. In these papers, subsequently the electricity sectors of the Netherlands (Chapter 3), Denmark (4), Germany (5) and the United Kingdom (6) are analysed. In Chapter 7, the Dutch waste and electricity sectors are compared. Chapter 8 provides a cross-country analysis of developments in the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom.

The empirical chapters are, apart from the introduction given in this chapter, preceded by an outline of the methodology used (Chapter 2). The thesis concludes with two evaluating chapters. In Chapter 9, the key hypotheses that evolved from the empirical research are evaluated by way of interviews and a questionnaire. Chapter 10 brings together the research lines set out previously by way of an overall discussion.

References

- Jong, P. de (1999) *Organising Waste Reduction in the Dutch Waste Sector Thesis*, University of Amsterdam
- Tellegen, E. (1989) 'From More to Less: Organisation of Energy Conservation and Waste Reduction' in: Reijnders, L. and E. Tellegen *Towards a New Iron Age / From More to Less (Dutch)* Van Gennep, Amsterdam