



CURRENTS OF POWER

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF ELECTRICITY PRODUCTION IN AN ALPINE COMMUNITY IN SWITZERLAND

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With the calls for a low-carbon energy future in many countries in Europe and beyond, there is a growing debate among both political activists and social scientists about how we might achieve an energy system that is not only “greener”, but also more democratic and more local. But while this concern is widely shared, there is still little research that enquires into the functioning and challenges of existing community owned energy companies. The research project that I am currently developing addresses this lacuna by means of an ethnographic study of the Gemeindewerke Erstfeld in the Canton of Uri that belongs entirely to the municipality. I ask: How does this small company balance the diverging and often clashing interests and requirements that actors on various levels want them to meet? How does it thus persist in an increasingly international market? And how are local relations of power in this ongoing balancing act reproduced, challenged and transformed?

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