

“WHITE COAL” OR “ABUSE OF NATURE”? CONFLICTS  
AROUND THE USE OF HYDRAULIC POWER IN THE  
(SUB-)ALPINE REGION: RIVERS IN THE BORDER  
REGION BETWEEN BAVARIA AND AUSTRIA

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The history of hydraulic power use in the Alpine countries Bavaria and Austria is characterized by conflict and compromise. Arriving at acceptable solutions for diverging requirements in connection with transborder rivers presented great difficulties in the field of tension between power generation, economic growth, considerations about landscape aesthetics, nature conservation, and regional identities. Not only did diverging sectoral interests clash, on a national level demands conflicted as well. In spite of their importance for transnational conflicts and cooperations, however, transborder rivers have hitherto been largely ignored in the context of research into the history of hydraulic power generation and of nature conservation in the Alpine region. The present contribution takes a look at the use of hydraulic power in Bavaria and Austria from a transnational, comparative perspective for the first time. The rivers Salzach, Inn, Danube, and Lech are looked at in order to examine the actors involved together with their respective networks, strategies, discourses and nature images. The result is as follows: The border-crossing rivers did not enjoy the same level of importance for the energy politics of the two Alpine countries considered. Moreover, their rating in the context of natural beauty and as goods belonging to the community varied also – with respect to the regions and over time as well.