

A Big Player Through a Small Lens. The OMV and Natural Gas Through an East Austrian Lens

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Kerngebiet: Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte

eingereicht bei: Mag. Dr. phil. Robert Groß

eingereicht im: SoSe 2023

Rubrik: Seminar-Arbeit

Abstract

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This seminar paper examines the representation of the fossil fuel company OMV in connection with natural gas in the socialist regional newspaper "Burgenländische Freiheit". The paper addresses the question of how the OMV is presented in connection with natural gas in the regional newspaper throughout the Second Republic. It proposes that the newspaper mainly discusses natural gas from an economic perspective and that the OMV is framed as acting according to federal state interests, while the oil company frames itself as environmentally friendly mainly through advertisements.

1. Introduction

Treasure hunters, experts and reliable partners – these features apply to the Austrian fossil fuel company OMV¹, according to the "Burgenländische Freiheit" (BF), the socialist regional newspaper published in Burgenland in the Second Republic until 2007. What sounds like a description of adventurers characterizes in fact the largest company in Austria, and it is the aim of this work to shed light on the presentation of this company in a regional newspaper.

1 From 1956 to 1995, the company was named ÖMV, afterwards it renamed itself as OMV. For the purpose of simplicity, the company will be referred to as "OMV" in this paper.

This work inspects a “big player”, the OMV, through a “small lens”, the BF, with a special focus on natural gas, bringing the fossil fuel – which has always played a secondary role compared to oil in regards to its delivery volume in the company – to the centre of attention. The main research question is how the OMV is presented in connection with natural gas in the regional newspaper from its founding until 2007. In order to address this question, the paper deals with three sub-questions: Firstly, how is the OMV framed in the context of regional news, secondly, what role is the OMV being attributed in the context of natural gas supply, and thirdly, what kind of attention does the OMV attract through advertising in the newspaper.

In order to answer this research question, the seminar paper analyses all digitalized editions of the BF in the timespan of the Second Republic by carrying out a category-based qualitative content analysis following Udo Kuckartz’ description.² The results of this analysis are quantified and described qualitatively, aiming to provide an overview of the development of the topic as well as an in-depth description of the identified different ways of coverage. Regarding the summary of the state of research this work especially discusses Alexander Smith’s article “OMV: A Case Study of an Austrian Global Player”³ and refers among others to Per Högselius⁴ and Herbert Rambousek⁵ in the context of the OMV and Anton Fennes⁶, Michael Floiger⁷ and August Ernst⁸ in the context of Burgenland and the regional newspaper.

This seminar paper is structured as follows: First it provides a very brief overview about the role of natural gas in Austria and Burgenland, then describes the “big player” OMV and the “small lens” BF. After a short summary of the applied method, the analysis’ results are presented and then discussed against the background of the state of research.

This work proposes that the BF mainly discusses natural gas from an economic perspective and that the OMV is framed as acting according to federal state interests. There are instances where the oil company frames itself as environmentally friendly by advertisements. The company comes mainly to the attention of the paper when it is involved in regionally significant developments like local gas explorations. This is also the main reason why the perception of OMV or natural gas remains at regional level and not at international level.

2 Udo Kuckartz, *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Methoden, Praxis, Computerunterstützung*, Weinheim-Basel 42018, pp. 100–121.

3 Alexander Smith, OMV. A Case Study of an Austrian Global Player, in: Günther Bischof/Fritz Plasser/Anton Pelinka/Alexander Smith (eds.), *Global Austria. Austria’s Place in Europe and the World* (Contemporary Austrian Studies 20), New Orleans 2011, pp. 161–183.

4 Per Högselius, *Red Gas. Russia and the Origins of European Energy Dependence* (Palgrave Macmillan Transnational History Series 19), New York 2013.

5 Herbert Rambousek, *Die “ÖMV Aktiengesellschaft”. Entstehung und Entwicklung eines nationalen Unternehmens der Mineralölindustrie*, phil. Diss. Vienna 1977.

6 Anton Fennes, *Das Burgenland als Medienlandschaft. Die Entwicklung der gedruckten und elektronischen Medien im Burgenland seit dem Jahre 1945*, in: Roland Widder (ed.), *Burgenland. Vom Grenzland im Osten zum Tor in den Westen. Geschichte der österreichischen Bundesländer seit 1945*, Vienna-Cologne-Weimar 2000, pp. 217–276.

7 Michael Floiger, *Zeitungen, Radio, Fernsehen. Die Entwicklung der burgenländischen Medienlandschaft*, in: Michael Floiger (ed.), *Atlas-Burgenland*, n. d., http://www.atlas-burgenland.at/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=847:zeitungen-radio-fernsehen-die-entwicklung-der-burgenlaendischen-medienlandschaft&catid=29&Itemid=101, accessed 12.8.2023.

8 August Ernst, *Geschichte des Burgenlandes*, Munich 1991².

2. Natural Gas in Austria and Burgenland

2.1 Austria

The turn from coal to oil and natural gas as the central energy sources in Europe can be traced back to the 1960s.⁹ In Austria, hydropower formed the most important provider regarding electricity throughout the twentieth century.¹⁰ Nevertheless, an increase in natural gas consumption can also be observed in Austria in the course of the century.¹¹ Despite discoveries of natural gas deposits in Austria after the Second World War, gas imports became necessary for a reliable national gas supply due to its increasing consumption.¹² In 1968, Austria became the first Western state to conclude a gas supply contract with the Soviet Union.¹³ From the mid-1970s onward, there has been a sharp increase in gas consumption, mainly due to the political objective of reducing dependency on oil imports – this, in turn, was mainly covered by gas imports, resulting in the growth of gas companies.¹⁴ From 1970 to the 2010s, Austria’s natural gas consumption almost tripled.¹⁵ It is particularly interesting to note in this context that Austrian politicians did not seek an active role in energy policy; instead, they aimed to create the impression of a private-sector affair involving the businesses concerned.¹⁶ Due to its position, the Austrian natural gas network is considered to have a key role in the European gas network in general.¹⁷

2.2 Burgenland

As early as 1936, oil and gas wells were drilled in the Seewinkel region of Burgenland, but these efforts were not crowned with success and did not give rise to any further ambitions until after the Second World War.¹⁸ No noteworthy deposits were found until the 1970s.¹⁹ With regard to energy supply, the company “Burgenländische Elektrizitätswirtschafts-AG” (BEWAG), and with regard to gas, the company “Burgen-

9 Robert Groß, *Zeitgeschichte und Umweltgeschichte*, in: Marcus Gräser/Dirk Rupnow (eds.), *Österreichische Zeitgeschichte – Zeitgeschichte in Österreich. Eine Standortbestimmung in Zeiten des Umbruchs* (Böhlau Zeitgeschichtliche Bibliothek 41), Vienna-Cologne 2021, pp. 618–637, here p. 630.

10 Verena Winiwarter/Michael Bürkner et al., *Environmental Histories of Contemporary Austria. An Introduction*, in: Marc Landry/Patrick Kupper (eds.), *Austrian Environmental History* (Contemporary Austrian Studies 27), New Orleans 2018, pp. 25–48, here p. 35.

11 Theodor Venus, *Die erste Ölkrise 1973/74 und ihre Folgen. Eine Fallstudie zur österreichischen Energiepolitik in der Ära Kreisky*, in: Maria Mesner/Theodor Venus/Remigio Gazzari (eds.), *Österreichische Wirtschaftspolitik 1970–2000*, Vienna n. d. (2008), p. 112.

12 Elisabeth Kreuzwieser, *Erdgas in Österreich*, n. d., <https://www.oogeschichte.at/archiv/themen/wirtschaft-und-industrie/geschichte-der-gaswirtschaft-in-ooe/geschichte-der-gaswirtschaft/erdgas-in-oesterreich>, accessed 10.8.2023.

13 Venus, *Die erste Ölkrise 1973/74 und ihre Folgen*, p. 112.

14 Elisabeth Edler, *Politischer Einfluss auf sozialökologische Transformationen. Die österreichische Energiepolitik zwischen 1970 und 1990*, MA thesis Vienna 2014, pp. 68–71.

15 Anna Riedler, *Das Erdgas-Dilemma. Welche Möglichkeiten hat Österreich für den Weg in eine unabhängige, klimaneutrale Zukunft?*, 2.6.2022, <https://science.apa.at/thema/erdgas/>, accessed 10.8.2023.

16 Herbert Lechner, *An der Gasleine. Zur Geschichte der Abhängigkeit Österreichs von russischem Erdgas*, Vienna 2023, pp. 7–8.

17 Kreuzwieser, *Erdgas in Österreich*.

18 Alfons Friedrich Tauber, *Ein Dezennium praktische Geologie im Burgenland*, in: *Burgenländische Heimatblätter* 23 (1961), pp. 188–194, here pp. 189–190.

19 Rambousek, *Die “ÖMV Aktiengesellschaft”*, p. 11.

ländische Erdgasversorgungs-AG" (BEGAS), proved to be the central players in Burgenland.²⁰ The construction of the Burgenland natural gas network can essentially be traced back to the late 1960s.²¹ The gas hub in the centrally located municipality of Baumgarten, which is operated by OMV, is a crucial centre of natural gas transport,²² also serving long-distance gas transport from Eastern Europe.²³

3. Big Player: OMV

In order to look at a global player from a regional perspective, it must first be described. OMV's prehistory lies in the (economic) consequences of the Second World War:²⁴ The Soviet Union laid claim to the Austrian petroleum industry and thus to Austrian oil deposits. For the extraction and execution of these raw materials, the Soviet Mineral Oil Administration (SMV) was founded.²⁵ Unofficially, these SMV subsidies served as quasi-reparations to the Soviet Union.²⁶ Following its withdrawal after the conclusion of the Austrian State Treaty, the government opted for nationalization, whereby SMV was succeeded by the Austrian Mineral Oil Administration (then ÖMV, later on OMV).²⁷ OMV was formally registered in the Commercial Register one year after the Soviet withdrawal.²⁸

The integration of the state-owned gas station operators Austrian-Russian Oil-Production (ÖROP) and Martha Erdöl proved helpful in establishing the company as a group of European relevance.²⁹ Initially, the company succeeded not only in meeting Soviet demands or contracts, but also in covering domestic needs. However, with the economic upswing in the 1960s came the need to develop new oil sources or cooperative ventures, which led to oil imports from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The construction of the Adriatic-Vienna pipeline, contractually agreed in 1967, represented a significant step for OMV towards becoming relevant in Central Europe's energy sector.³⁰ Nevertheless, during the 1970s and until the late 1980s, investments remained higher in Austria than abroad.³¹

20 Ernst, *Geschichte des Burgenlandes*, p. 302.

21 Karl Bachinger, *Geschichte der gewerblichen Wirtschaft des Burgenlandes*, Eisenstadt 1973, p. 275.

22 Lechner, *An der Gasleine*, p. 11.

23 Kvetoslava Šoltéssová/Jaroslav Šoltés, Slowakei, in: Tino Schütte (ed.), *Leistungsgebundene Energieversorgung in Mittel- und Osteuropa. Elektrizität, Erdgas und Fernwärme*, Wiesbaden 2019, pp. 51–72, here p. 57.

24 Barbara Stelzl-Marx, *Kriegsfolgenforschung*, in: Marcus Gräser/Dirk Rupnow (eds.), *Österreichische Zeitgeschichte – Zeitgeschichte in Österreich. Eine Standortbestimmung in Zeiten des Umbruchs* (Böhlau Zeitgeschichtliche Bibliothek 41), Vienna-Cologne 2021, pp. 390–411, here p. 398.

25 Högselius, *Red Gas*, pp. 45–46.

26 Walter Iber, *Erdöl statt Reparationen. Die Sowjetische Mineralölverwaltung in Österreich 1945–1955*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 57 (2009), no. 4, pp. 571–606, here p. 588.

27 Högselius, *Red Gas*, pp. 45–46.

28 Marie-Louise Skolud, *Von der Stadtgasversorgung zum Erdgasimport. Der Gasimportvertrag zwischen Österreich und der Sowjetunion 1968 im historischen Kontext*, diploma thesis Vienna 2013, p. 46.

29 Smith, *OMV. A Case Study of an Austrian Global Player*, p. 163.

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*, p. 164.

This was followed by an international reorientation of the company.³² At the turn of the millennium, major mergers took place in the international petroleum industry on a large scale (examples include Exxon and Mobil) – this trend also affected smaller companies where OMV took on an active role, especially in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. At the same time, relations with the Russian company Gazprom were secured. By contrast, a merger with the Austrian electricity supplier Verbund failed, as did one with the Hungarian company MOL, the main competitor on the Eastern European market.³³ Nevertheless, OMV has secured a solid position in the international petroleum industry, which Smith aptly describes:

“It has become the largest oil and gas company of Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe. Thanks to creative managerial decision-making and the consequent and systematic pursuit of its expansion strategy, OMV increased its revenues fivefold from 5 billion euros at the end of the 1990s to 25 billion euros a decade later [...]. Even if in its relevant downstream markets the Austrian energy group is both in size and performance a major player, in worldwide comparison it is [...] among the international integrated majors.”³⁴

3.1 *Natural Gas – OMV’s unwanted child*

Already under Soviet control after 1945, natural gas proved to be rather uninteresting for the corporation. The focus was clearly on oil, there were hardly any investments related to natural gas.³⁵ In Austria, the Lower Austrian natural gas provider NIOGAS and later the Upper Austrian company OÖ Ferngas and Wiener Stadtwerke proved to be much more significant for gas supply, but these became central customers of OMV.³⁶ Particularly until 1960, natural gas production in Austria showed a strong increase (the share almost doubled from 1958 to 1960 alone) and then experienced a relative stabilization.³⁷

In the production of fossil raw materials, OMV clearly focused on crude oil, while natural gas again played more of a secondary role.³⁸ It was not until the late 1960s that the group itself began to pay more attention to natural gas, initially focussing only domestic sources – OMV did not engage with gas production outside of Austria until 1990.³⁹ Here, OMV gained the role of a pioneer in natural gas trade by concluding Western Europe’s first gas import contract with the Soviet Union.⁴⁰ Further natural gas contracts

32 Smith, OMV. A Case Study of an Austrian Global Player, pp. 165–166.

33 Ibid., pp. 168–171.

34 Ibid., p. 173.

35 Högselius, Red Gas, p. 46.

36 Ibid., p. 47.

37 N. A., Gesamtschau der österreichischen Wirtschaft im Jahre 1960, in: *Monatsberichte des Österreichischen Institutes für Wirtschaftsforschung* 34 (1961), no. 1, pp. 90–148, here p. 116.

38 Rambousek, Die “ÖMV Aktiengesellschaft”, p. 213.

39 Smith, OMV. A Case Study of an Austrian Global Player, pp. 164–165.

40 Andreas Resch, Austrian Foreign Trade and Austrian Companies’ Economic Engagement in Eastern Europe (CEE) since 1989, in: Günter Bischof/Ferdinand Karhofer (eds.), *Austria’s International Position after the End of the Cold War* (Contemporary Austrian Studies 22), Innsbruck 2013, pp. 198–223, here p. 209–210.

with this country followed in 1974 and 1975.⁴¹ OMV opposed gas deal with Algeria due to fear of a price increase for Russian gas – but when the contract was concluded, it changed its strategy and obtained coordinative participation, after long controversies with Economics Minister Josef Staribacher, Finance Minister Hannes Androsch and Austria-Ferngas.⁴² To put it simply, OMV always showed a greater interest in oil than in natural gas, tending to leave the latter to other companies – hence one could argue to call natural gas an unwanted child of the OMV.

4. Small Lens: “Burgenländische Freiheit”

The newspaper “Burgenländische Freiheit” was first published in the course of the founding of the Burgenland Social Democratic Party in 1921.⁴³ During the Second Austrian Republic, the newspaper reappeared as a party newspaper after initially being subject to surveillance by the Soviet occupation. Under the social democrat Fred Sinowatz, the daily underwent a turnaround in 1966 in the direction of a regional newspaper, from which the name “Burgenland Freiheit – Die Zeitung für das Burgenland” (Burgenland Freedom – The Newspaper for Burgenland), established in 1967, was derived. Despite attempts of reorganization, the paper gradually found itself in retreat from the 1980s onward, and in 2007 it was discontinued; a planned free delivery to all Burgenland households was not realized.⁴⁴

Since Burgenland never had a daily newspaper, party newspapers were able to secure a considerable readership for a long time.⁴⁵ While not exceeding 10,000 copies until the 1960s, the newspaper’s circulation figures experienced significant upswing in the mid-1970s reaching more than 75,000 readers due to its modernization efforts and the low level of attention to local Burgenland issues by the radio. As the latter gained more momentum in the 1980s, circulation figures declined again: In the 1990s, the BF reached only 20,000 to 30,000 readers, before rebounding to just over 100,000 readers around the turn of the millennium and maintaining circulation figures of 70,000 until the end. In the course of the increased emergence of free newspapers (for example, the “Bezirksblätter”), the general decline of party newspapers and economic difficulties, their discontinuation finally followed in 2007.⁴⁶

In 2010, the “Freunde der BF” association published an online archive of the newspaper, in which the 4,000 individual issues published since 1922 are made accessible. The association describes the newspaper as the most important medium for hundreds of thousands of Burgenlanders.⁴⁷

41 Rambousek, Die “ÖMV Aktiengesellschaft”, p. 103.

42 Venus, Die erste Ölkrise 1973/74 und ihre Folgen, p. 133.

43 Floiger, Zeitungen, Radio, Fernsehen.

44 Ibid.

45 Fennes, Das Burgenland als Medienlandschaft, p. 217.

46 BF Online Archiv, IV. Zeit der Reformen. 1961–2006, n. d., <http://bf-archiv.at/cgi-bin/page.pl?id=4>, accessed 12.8.2023.

47 BF Online Archiv, n. d., <http://bf-archiv.at/>, accessed 12.8.2023.

At the beginning of the Second Republic, the newspaper was primarily the mouthpiece of Social Democratic delegates, who used it primarily for attacks against the KPÖ and the ÖVP, the latter being in power in the country, and organizations close to them.⁴⁸ The newspaper noticeably toned down its rhetoric over time⁴⁹ and towards the end of the 1960s shifted its attention more to sporting events.⁵⁰ Despite temporarily reaching a large part of the population, the BF remained a party newspaper of the SPÖ. It was always under the management of different social democratic functionaries. Only in the last two years of its existence did it formally become independent, though it retained some of the original staff.⁵¹

5. Method and Sources

Before presenting the results, the research method and the access to the examined sources are briefly described. The underlying research method of this thesis is a qualitative content analysis according to Kuckartz.⁵² More specifically, a structuring content analysis was conducted. This qualitative method is dedicated to comprehensible structuring along transparent and distinguishable categories. After sorting and filtering the data material, based on the research question and the state of research, structuring categories are formed. Each symbolic or linguistic unit – in this work: paragraphs or illustrations – is then coded, based on these categories, whereby multiple assignments are permissible. For further differentiation and deeper description of the data material, the categories are subdivided into further subcategories.

In the case of this article, the data material was categorized several times and categories could be overlapping where appropriate or necessary. The generated category system can be found in the appendix. The text material structured in this way is the starting point for the creation of thematic essays, which can be found in the following chapter, ultimately leading to an overall analysis with the evaluation of the overall impression.⁵³ It has to be stated that the established categories used in this work are per se a construct and that they were generated inductively (ergo in the process of the analysis itself). This for example is evident in the differentiation of regional, national and global news, where the contribution is based on Donges' micro-meso-macro differentiation.⁵⁴

The aim of this work is to combine qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data obtained. The latter is mainly used to visualize trends. In this paper, the sources under

48 BF Online Archiv, III. Der Neuanfang nach dem II. Weltkrieg. 1946 – 1960, n. d., <http://bf-archiv.at/cgi-bin/page.pl?id=3>, accessed 12.8.2023.

49 Fennes, *Das Burgenland als Medienlandschaft*, p. 224.

50 BF Online Archiv, IV. Zeit der Reformen.

51 Karl-Renner-Institut, *Die Geschichte der "Burgenländischen Freiheit"*, n. d. <https://rotbewegt.at/lexikon/die-geschichte-der-burgenlaendischen-freiheit-bf/>, accessed 3.4.2024.

52 Kuckartz, *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse*, pp. 100–121.

53 *Ibid.*, pp. 101–117.

54 Patrick Donges, *Politische Organisationen als Mikro-Meso-Makro-Link*, in: Thorsten Quandt/Bertram Scheufele (eds.), *Ebenen der Kommunikation. Mikro-Meso-Makro-Links in der Kommunikationswissenschaft*, Wiesbaden 2011, pp. 217–232, here pp. 217–220.

consideration were accessed via the ANNO portal, where the editions are also available in digital form and could be examined by means of a digital full-text search.⁵⁵

6. The Big Player Through the Small Lens

The following chapter presents the content analysis' results. Exactly 156 newspaper editions could be identified in which the OMV is mentioned in a relevant way. However, only 54 of these text parts are also connected explicitly to the topic of natural gas, as will be seen in the following paragraphs.⁵⁶

In a summarized overall view of the data material, the OMV mentions can basically be divided into six types: First of all, regional news as well as national or global news, further text-types or advertisements with economic as well as ecological focus, sponsoring and advertisements. Figure 1 shows the categorized breakdown of these mentions of all places with a reference to natural gas.⁵⁷

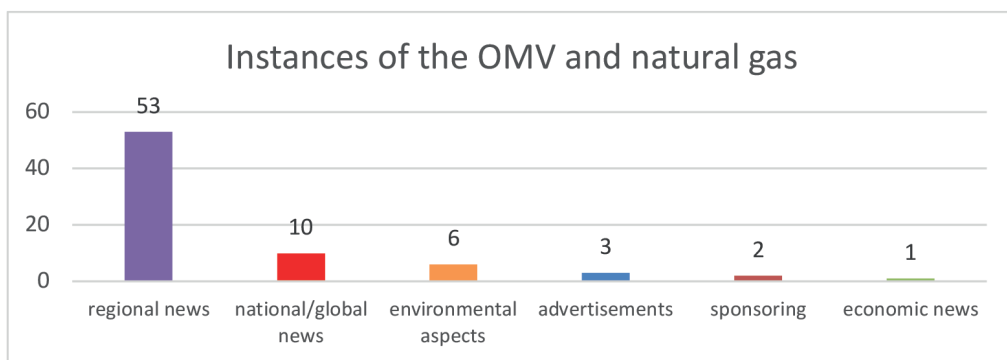


Figure 1: Instances of the OMV and the natural gas

6.1 Regional Aspects and News

The following subchapters shed light on how the group and natural gas appear in relation to these different types of media presence in the BF. The main differentiation of the analysed articles is the question of scale: Firstly, this paper discusses news related to the federal level, and afterwards expands on the national and international level. Most instances by far are related to regional news. Figure 2 shows how these are composed thematically. The newspaper addresses questions of energy supply, natural gas exploration and cooperations with or shareholding of other companies to a similar extent, very few instances refer to local events etc.⁵⁸

55 Burgenländische Freiheit. 1921 bis 2007, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, https://anno.onb.ac.at/info/blf_info.html, accessed 16.7.2023.

56 See addendum 3 in this article.

57 See addendum 2 in this article.

58 See addendum 2 in this article.

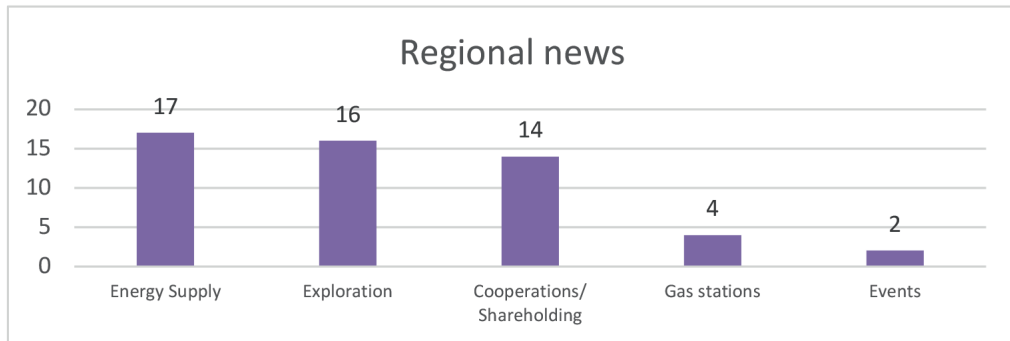


Figure 2: Regional News

6.1.1 Energy supply

A topic that is found from the 1960s to the early 1990s is the question of energy supply.⁵⁹ In the beginning, the OMV mainly appears as a relevant player besides the federal governments and the federal gas companies, like BEGAS for example.⁶⁰ The newspaper reiterates positions of socialist politicians, praising the OMV as a reliable provider of energy and mentions starting constructions of natural gas pipelines.⁶¹

In this context, the newspaper sometimes also mentions Soviet gas, for example plans for the Trans Austria Gasleitung (TAG) in 1972, where the OMV is presented as a driving force for a reliable energy supply of the Burgenland. This aspect also correlates with natural gas exploration, as discussed in the section afterwards.⁶²

In the second half of the 1970s the newspaper mainly reflects on the OMV as a provider of energy as well as a partner of the local BEGAS⁶³ and reports on its efforts to expand the gas supply, as the following example shows:

“Ein 30 Mann starker Spezialtrupp der ÖMV hat die Gasleitung [...] bereits bis nach Riedlingsdorf vorangetrieben und ist nun dabei, die [...] Stahlrohre bis in den Raum Oberwart zu verlegen. Für diese komplizierte Tätigkeit können nur hochqualifizierte Facharbeiter herangezogen werden. Die Männer der ÖMV haben durch die Pipeline-Bauten bereits einschlägige Erfahrungen gesammelt.”⁶⁴

This further exemplifies that the newspaper in this case tends to praise the company's expertise and actions.

6.1.2 Natural gas (and oil) exploration

Nearly as prevalent as questions of energy supply are news about attempted natural gas explorations in Burgenland. Starting in 1970, the newspaper reports on the beginning of exploration efforts, rating the actions of the company advantageous (“günstig”)

59 See addendum 3 in this article.

60 *Burgenländische Freiheit* (henceforth: *BF*), 12.5.1967, p. 1.

61 *BF*, 19.3.1970, p. 3; *BF*, 9.4.1970, p. 3.

62 *BF*, 7.9.1972, p. 17.

63 *BF*, 23.6.1976, p. 4.

64 *BF*, 28.7.1976, p. 5.

for the federal state. Generally, the newspaper tends to report positively on the exploration, as seen in the following quote very clearly:

“Aber der entscheidende Anfang ist gemacht! Das Burgenland und seine Vertreter hoffen natürlich, daß sich die Vermutungen, [...], auch erfüllen werden. [...] Bleibt nur zu hoffen, daß die Vermessungsarbeiten von Erfolg begleitet sein werden und [...] somit das burgenländische Erdölzeitalter anbrechen kann.”⁶⁵

This also demonstrates that the newspaper’s coverage tends to focus on oil or talks about oil and gas together (as seen in titles just addressing oil as “Die Suche nach Erdöl hat begonnen”).⁶⁶ The OMV itself is frequently addressed as “treasure hunters” (“Schatzsucher”) and emphasizes the professionally acting prospectors.⁶⁷ Also the leader of the prospection receives very positive attention in a special report:

“Natürlich hofft jeder, man werde etwas entdecken. Vor allem natürlich auch der Leiter des ganzen Unternehmens, Dr. Kröll. [...] Seine zwanzigjährige Erfahrung auf diesem Gebiet gibt auch dem Burgenland die Gewähr, daß hier nichts übersehen wird. Und wenn die Arbeiter Ingenieure der ÖMV in den Tiefen des Bodens unseres Landes wirklich das ‘schwarze Gold’ finden, dann ist das nicht zuletzt das Verdienst ihres Chefs Dr. Kröll.”⁶⁸

This again shows the positive framing of the OMV. After 1971, very few passages still discuss unsuccessful explorations. The newspaper unfrequently and briefly mentions some progress of the prospectations, yet ultimately the coverage comes to a halt in the middle of the 1970s with the unsuccessful end of the explorations.⁶⁹

6.1.3 Cooperations or shareholding

With only one exception regarding the involvement in a gas pipeline constructed in 1970⁷⁰ the aspect of the relationship between OMV and other companies is discussed in the 1990s, mainly in 1996 and 1997.⁷¹ Here the newspaper reports frequently about OMV’s attempt on gaining influence on the local natural gas company BEGAS. Starting in April 1996, the newspaper reports that a share of 25 % might be bought by the OMV,⁷² calling it a logical decision while simultaneously framing the Lower Austrian gas company EVN’s interest negatively (reiterating Burgenland’s SPÖ-governor Stix (1991–2000) objections against it).⁷³ Later the newspaper calls the OMV’s attempt a marriage proposal⁷⁴ and mainly frames the EVN as disadvantageous, as the following quote shows:

65 *BF*, 3.9.1970, p. 5.

66 *Ibid.*

67 *BF*, 22.10.1970, p. 7; *BF*, 12.11.1970, p. 7; *BF*, 28.1.1971, p. 5.

68 *BF*, 22.7.1971, p. 13.

69 See addendum 3 in this article; *BF*, 27.11.1974, p. 1; *BF*, 9.1.1975, p. 1.

70 *BF*, 9.4.1970, p. 3.

71 See addendum 3 in this article.

72 *BF*, 3.4.1996, p. 12.

73 *BF*, 2.5.1996, p. 3; N. A., Karl Stix, in: *Parlament Österreich*, 2.9.2008, <https://www.parlament.gv.at/person/2875>, accessed 15.2.2024.

74 *BF*, 4.9.1996, p. 3.

“Daß der Widerstand der EVN gegen ‘gebündelte’ Gemeindeinteressen in der Begas handfeste Gründe hat, ist offenkundig: Die Gemeinden sollen sich bei der Suche nach einem strategischen Partner keinen anderen aussuchen können als - die EVN. [...] Für die Begas, so Stix, gehe es um eine Strategie, die Fremdbestimmung vermeidet: ‘Wir wollen selbst entscheiden können, was in Zukunft am Wirtschaftsstandort Burgenland passiert - und nicht Rudolf Gruber von der EVN.’ Ähnlich SP-Gemeindevertreterchef Walter Prior: ‘Wir wollen eine burgenländische Lösung für die Begas, [...]’⁷⁵

It becomes clear that the newspaper gives much attention to the federal socialist government as well as the BEGAS itself who prefer a collaboration with the OMV, stating that it should be the leading partner.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the EVN would end up becoming BEGAS’ partner, resulting in a slight shift in tonality after its offer to ensure the voting rights of involved communities.⁷⁷

6.1.4 Others: Events and gas stations

Rather uninteresting are other mentions of the OMV in connection with local or regional events. For example there is a brief note in 1995 about a collaboration between OMV and the Russian natural gas industry organizing an excursion for Russian youths, which does not really seem relevant except that it reflects the international contacts the company has – One could argue that this might also reflect a supposed proximity of the SPÖ and Russia, as the socialist paper points out the event in a very positive light, calling it a “schöne Tradition” (“wonderful tradition”).⁷⁸

6.2 Global or National News

News that go beyond the regional or federal level mainly contain news about trade (apart from one description of a newly constructed refinery, in which natural gas is described as a rising energy source and the OMV as trying to meet the rising prosperity).⁷⁹ In the 1960s there is just one instance, in May 1967, of the discussion of trade in the newspaper, allowing a brief insight into the first natural gas trade pact with the Soviet Union. The OMV is mentioned as the main company involved in the negotiations besides the federal states’ natural gas companies.⁸⁰ Twenty years after the contract’s completion, the newspaper celebrates the anniversary in a brief text, showing that this is in fact a relevant topic decades later.⁸¹

In connection to fossil fuel explorations the newspaper also briefly touches on cooperations between the OMV and the US-company Mecom, yet it does not provide any insight into exchanges between the two companies.⁸² Between 1971 and 1990 there

75 BF, 11.12.1996, p. 3.

76 BF, 26.2.1997, p. 4.

77 BF, 23.7.1997, p. 7.

78 BF, 2.8.1995, p. 4.

79 BF, 23.12.1961, p. 9.

80 BF, 12.5.1967, p. 2.

81 BF, 18.8.1988, p. 47.

82 BF, 18.6.1970, p. 1; BF, 25.6.1970, p. 2.

are no relevant mentions of this topic. In 1990 the newspaper mentions OMV's interest in gas imports from Northern Europe, calling it a leading force ("federführend") regarding gas imports.⁸³

Lastly the newspaper covers the beginning and the end of the constructions of the Hungaria-Austria-Pipeline from 1994 to 1996. In this context the OMV is presented again as an international player, as the following quote shows:

"Für die ÖMV, die in Österreich ein großes Netz von Ferngasleitungen betreibt – sowohl für die Erdgas-Versorgung des Inlandes als auch für den europäischen Erdgastransit –, ist diese Pipeline auch für die Versorgungssicherheit von Bedeutung, [...]. Und Ungarn eröffnet die Hungaria Austria Gasleitung die Möglichkeit, seine Gasanlieferungen zu diversifizieren."⁸⁴

Furthermore the installation of this pipeline is celebrated as an international success, being called a "völkerverbindende Leitung" and "Symbol einer sinnvollen und funktionierenden Partnerschaft"⁸⁵ Interestingly, other mentions about Hungarian natural gas, which would be near the federal state, could not be found in the newspaper.

6.3 Environmental Discussions and Advertisements

Particularly in context of questions of an environmentally friendly framing of natural gas, the newspaper in general is very noteworthy as it even contains a natural gas journal ("Erdgas Journal") in the late 1990s.⁸⁶ However, the OMV itself only marginally appears in this context.⁸⁷ Only in the 1990s four mentions can be found, of which one shall be analysed.⁸⁸ With the slogan "Offen für mehr Verantwortung" ("Open to more responsibility") the company launches two advertisements in this context. The first of them reads as follows (with a picture showing a European green lizard):

"Sie sind noch nicht ausgestorben! Gemeint sind die Menschen mit Verantwortung und Idealismus zur Erhaltung unserer Umwelt. Erdgas leistet hier einen wichtigen Beitrag. Da wir eine unserer Hauptaufgaben, den umweltschonenden unterirdischen Transport, erfreulicherweise nicht zeigen können, unterstützen wir die Ausbildung von Freilandpädagogen durch das Naturhistorische Museum in Wien. Diese helfen mit ihrem Wissen Jugendlichen in Österreich die Natur neu zu verstehen und sich für deren Erhaltung zu begeistern. Und so entdecken sie vielleicht mit unserer Hilfe ihre erste Smaragdeidechse in freier Natur. **Offen für mehr Verantwortung. OMV Erdgas.** [Original emphasis]"⁸⁹

Here the OMV aims to present itself as a company supporting the protection of the environment by sponsoring the natural history museum in Vienna. More interestingly,

83 *BF*, 26.9.1990, p. 11.

84 *BF*, 14.9.1994, p. 5.

85 *BF*, 6.11.1996, p. 13.

86 See for example: *BF*, 7.4.1999, p. 15.

87 See addendum 2 in this article.

88 See addendum 3 in this article.

89 *BF. Erdgas Journal*, 01.12.1995, p. VII.

in the same advertisement the OMV describes natural gas as an important aspect of the production of sustainable energy and it emphasizes that the transport of natural gas is environmentally friendly as it takes place below-surface. This already shows a significant overlap between environmental aspects and advertisements, which will become clearer in the following section, where the second kind of this advertisement will be discussed.

In context of the construction of the Hungaria-Austria-Pipeline the newspaper underlines that the building process aimed to be environmentally friendly (“Besonderes Augenmerk wurde auf die Erhaltung von Naturschutzgebieten [...] gelegt.”).⁹⁰ Natural gas is moreover described as an environmentally friendly alternative (“eine umweltfreundliche Alternative”⁹¹) to liquid fuel.⁹² Lastly the OMV appears once more in a special report regarding natural gas and its impact on the environment as the main source for statistics about toxicity and carbon dioxide emissions of fossil fuels. Once again natural gas is praised as the most advantageous fossil fuel.⁹³

As advertisements reflect the self-reception of the company and its environmentally friendly depiction of natural gas, they shall be discussed in this sub-chapter as well. As only very few advertisements by the OMV show any connection to natural gas, two advertisements seem worth mentioning, one of which has been already discussed.⁹⁴ Moreover, the one advertisement discussing natural gas ties into the earlier mentioned environmental discussion and presents natural gas in a positive way both economically and environmentally, as it reads:

“Mehr Erdgas. Weniger Sorgen. Steigende Nachfrage nach Heizenergie schärft den Blick für die Umwelt. Eine der umweltschonendsten Energien: Erdgas. Die OMV schafft hier Sicherheit. Mit langfristigen Lieferverträgen. Großspeichern. Und einer Position, die Österreich zur Erdgas-Drehscheibe Mitteleuropas macht. **Offen für mehr Verantwortung. OMV Erdgas.** [Original emphasis]”⁹⁵

Also noteworthy about this advertisement is that for the visual representation of this aspect the company chooses to present a woman, refocusing from technology and fossil fuels to humans, and with femininity in mind also family and “Mother Earth”. This is a prime example of the company positioning itself as a global player, acting according to Austrian national interests and becoming more environmentally responsible – one could argue that this advertisement perfectly encapsulates the role of natural gas in the company’s presentation in the newspaper, as it is one of the few instances this fuel is regarded worth mentioning, and given that the company presents it and itself as environmentally responsible and as a global player for Austrian interests.

90 *BF*, 6.11.1996, p. 13.

91 *BF*, 19.4.2007, p. 28.

92 *BF*, 5.7.2007, p. 9.

93 *BF, Erdgasmagazin*, 26.11.1997, p. 12.

94 See addendum 2 in this article; *BF, Erdgas Journal*, 1.12.1995, p. VII.

95 *BF*, 19.3.1997, p. 9. This ad was actually published twice, as seen in *BF*, 6.11.1996, p. 88, with a few text adaptations which do not change the overall message. In this case, the advertisement was in fact printed on the rear page of this newspaper-edition, making it a very easily visible advertisement.

6.4 Where natural gas is (nearly) nowhere to be found: Sponsoring and Economic News

In general, the OMV frequently appears as a sponsor for sports events, therefore showing in this way an involvement in local events and organizations. However, there is hardly ever any direct connection between natural gas and these instances.⁹⁶ Similar to sponsoring it can be stated that the company itself occasionally is talked about in economic news, especially regarding share sales.⁹⁷ Nevertheless in 1977, the OMV is actually mentioned in a commentary, where the company is considered more capable of being a reliable provider of natural gas than the local BEGAS due to its international position, contributing to the vital core of the economy (“Lebensnerv der Wirtschaft”).⁹⁸ Otherwise, there is no overlap between natural gas and economic news regarding the OMV.⁹⁹

6.5 Development over time

The following figure 4 depicts all mentions of ÖMV or OMV, sorted by year.

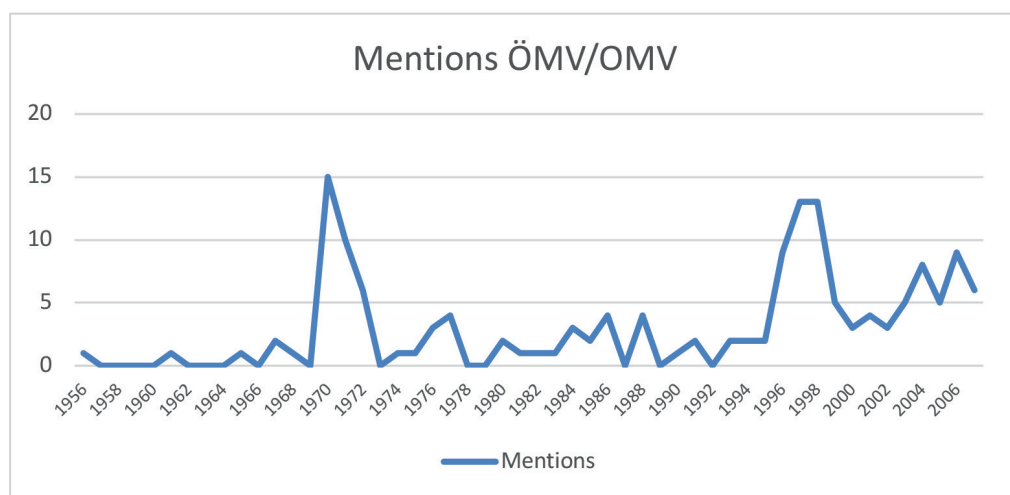


Figure 3: Mentions ÖMV/OMV 1956–2007

The graph shows that in the 1950s and 1960s there is only a very small interest in the company, which then skyrocketed to a high peak in the early 1970s. Afterwards the company finds itself in a reduced place of attention in the 1980s, before again gaining attention in the late 1990s and sort of maintaining it until the ultimate end of the newspaper itself in 2007.¹⁰⁰ The spike in interest in the early 1970s can mainly be attributed to the gas and oil explorations in Burgenland, whereas the spike in the 1990s correlates with the attention the BEGAS receives. In both cases the focus remains on the regional

⁹⁶ See addendum 2 in this article.

⁹⁷ For example: *BF*, 18.10.2007, p. 8.

⁹⁸ *BF*, 30.3.1977, p. 2.

⁹⁹ See addendum 2 in this article.

¹⁰⁰ See addendum 3 in this article.

level and it is only secondary that the OMV is gaining international relevance, for example with the already-mentioned contract with the Soviet Union. However, when inspecting this attention in a very condensed manner, one could argue that this in fact shows an increase of the company’s relevance – therefore showing the growth into a “big player”.

In addition to this graph, it is also possible to inspect the development of natural-gas-related news over the course of time, which is depicted in figure 5:

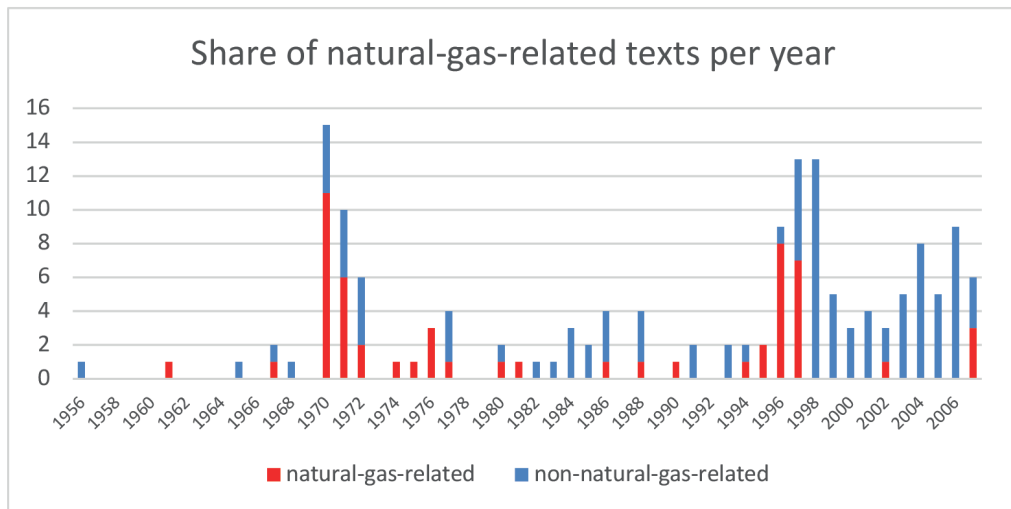


Figure 4: Share of natural-gas-related texts per year 1956–2007

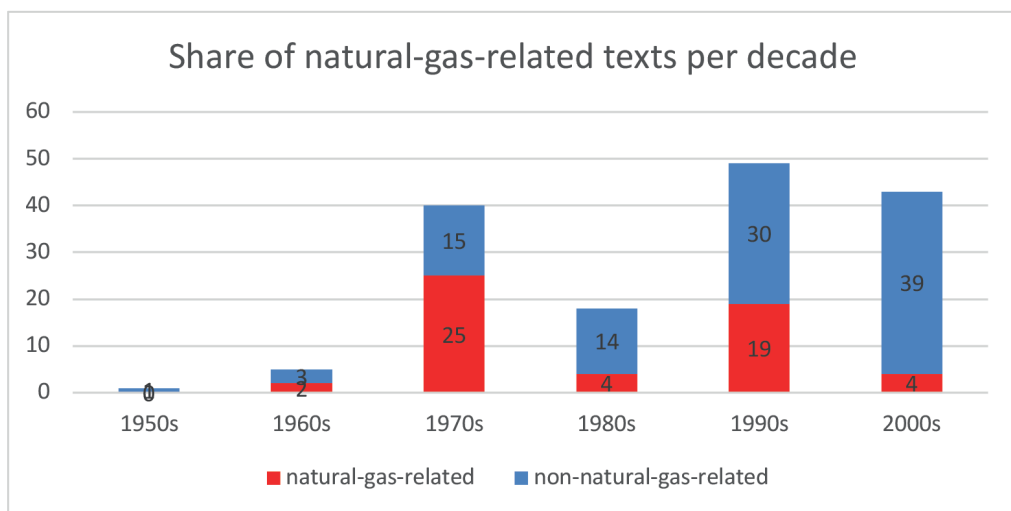


Figure 5: Share of natural-gas-related texts per decade 1956–2007

It becomes clear that there are some years mentioning news about the OMV but without any connection to natural gas. Nevertheless, this demonstrates that the early 1970s and the late 1990s are the times where the newspaper paid the most attention to the company also in the context of the topic of natural gas – again due to the explorations and its entanglement with BEGAS.¹⁰¹ If summarized by decade, the newspaper shows the following development, also demonstrated in figure 6:

In every decade except the 1970s the newspaper focuses more on non-natural-gas-related texts, with very little instances especially in the 1980s and 2000s, no instance in the 1950s. The 1990s show a share of nearly 40 % (as well as the 1960s in a very marginalized dimension relatively to the other decades), and in the 1970s natural gas is actually mentioned in 62.5 % of the company-related texts. This can on the one hand be attributed to the explorations, which generally tend to mention natural gas alongside oil, on the other hand to discussions of energy supply, where the OMV tends to be presented as a reliable provider of natural gas.¹⁰²

6.6 *Concluding Impression and Discussion of Findings*

Taking all these aspects into account, it becomes clear that the newspaper – rather unsurprisingly – especially focuses on regional topics related to the company and natural gas. The findings show that the company receives the most attention in connection with the oil and gas explorations in the early 1970s and the negotiations about the BEGAS shareholding in the 1990s, both of which the OMV ultimately fails to deduct successfully. In this context the company is presented in a very positive way, emphasizing its expertise as well as its international position. In addition to that, especially regarding these topics the newspaper tends to reiterate positions of regional socialist politicians, as seen in sub-chapter 6.1.3.

Besides these two very big topics throughout the coverage, the OMV does not receive a very large amount of attention. However, if it does, the newspaper tends to present it as a reliable company acting in national and federal interests and also regularly touches on its international connections and cooperations, mainly Hungary and the Soviet Union or Russia. In the context of protection of the environment the company seldomly appears noteworthy, with its own advertisement being the only remarkable exception – a finding which should not surprise anyone. To conclude the main part of this paper, the analysis' findings shall be connected to the state of research in the following paragraph.

Overall, the newspaper visualizes a considerable gap between the OMV as an oil company and the OMV as a natural gas company – with 102 text parts not related to natural gas compared to 54 text parts related to natural gas, the newspaper mentions the company nearly twice as often without a connection to natural gas, whereas 93 out of these 156 text parts mention oil. This can be seen as a confirmation of the subordinate

101 See addendum 3 in this article.

102 See addendum 3 in this article.

role of natural gas in the company, as described for example by Rambousek.¹⁰³ However, the general increase in texts related to gas in connection with questions of energy supply actually reflect the European and Austrian trend of a growing gas demand beginning in the 1960s, as stated referring to Groß earlier.¹⁰⁴ Also the tendentially growing correlation of the company and natural gas in the news coverage can be seen as a reflection of OMV's slow turning towards natural gas, which has already been pointed out by Smith.¹⁰⁵ In addition to that, the newspaper not only offers a brief insight into the first gas trade with the Soviet Union in 1968, which has been described by Högselius in great detail, yet it also recalls this event years later, confirming the significance of this event, as put by Mesner.¹⁰⁶

Regarding the perception of the OMV, it is notable that the coverage of international engagement firstly increases in the 1960s and 1970s but pauses until the construction of the Hungaria-Austria-pipeline in the 1990s. Therefore, the sources only partially align with the gradual development of the company into a global player as described by Smith. Nevertheless, the emphasis on the topic trade in regard to global and national news generally can be viewed as principally corresponding to the company's development.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, it is striking that the OMV generally is perceived very positive, especially seen in the oil and gas explorations and the discussed shareholding of BEGAS, where it is frequently praised as a competent company. This praising of the OMV as a national company fighting for Austrian interests generally aligns with the company's presentation and perception as well as its communication strategy, which has been outlined in great detail by Pfoertner.¹⁰⁸

In regard to the orientation and focus of the newspaper, the company received much attention especially in connection with two topics: regional gas explorations in the 1970s and the proposed shareholding of the regional gas company BEGAS in the 1990s. Two major deductions can be pointed out in this context. Firstly (and quite obviously), the attention of regional events corresponds with the editorial focus of the newspaper, being a regional medium. Secondly, especially in the context of BEGAS, the newspaper tends to reiterate positions of local and regional socialist politicians such as the governor of Burgenland. Therefore especially this part of the news coverage also demonstrates the newspaper's political focus and it reflects the kind of rhetoric Fennes pointed out, describing it as moderately but still clearly a party-owned paper.¹⁰⁹

Besides these two big regional topics, the company rather infrequently appears as a sponsor of sport events and a partner of gas stations. It also inserts advertisements supporting its positive perception. It is in this context that questions of environmental protection are addressed, where natural gas is presented as an environmentally friendly

103 Rambousek, *Die "ÖMV Aktiengesellschaft"*, p. 213.

104 Groß, *Zeitgeschichte und Umweltgeschichte*.

105 Smith, *OMV. A Case Study of an Austrian Global Player*, pp. 164–165.

106 Högselius, *Red Gas*, pp. 45–46; Venus, *Die erste Ölkrise 1973/74 und ihre Folgen*, p. 112.

107 Smith, *OMV. A Case Study of an Austrian Global Player*, p. 163.

108 André Pfoertner, *ÖMV/OMV. "Unser Erdöl muss österreichisch bleiben"*, in: Emil Brix/Ernst Bruckmüller/Hannes Stekl (eds.), *Memoria Austriae III. Unternehmer, Firmen, Produkte*, Vienna 2005, pp. 352–394, here pp. 353–369.

109 Fennes, *Das Burgenland als Medienlandschaft*, p. 224.

fossil fuel, and the company claims to set actions for the protection of the environment by being involved into the distribution of natural gas.

To summarize, the BF proves to be a “small lens”, that focuses on the regional activities of the “big player” OMV – the company tends to be presented in a positive light and manages to appear first of all as a reliable player regarding gas and energy supply and second as a nationally and regionally important and relevant company.

7. Conclusion

This work aimed to inspect a “big player”, the OMV, through a “small lens”, the BF, with a special focus on natural gas. Based on the research question, how the OMV is presented in connection with natural gas in the regional newspaper from its founding until 2007, all editions of the newspaper were analysed according to Kuckartz’ methodology of a qualitative content analysis. The previous discussion of the results clearly shows that natural gas only played a secondary role in the coverage of the OMV, reflecting its company policy which focuses on oil rather than natural gas.

The newspaper proved to be especially receptive to the OMV in context of regional news, where the most attention, that the company received, was in connection with the local gas explorations in the 1970s and the attempted shareholding of the local gas company BEGAS in the 1990s. In both cases, the newspaper showed an affinity for the OMV, in case of the explorations due to its enthusiasm for a possible “oil age” in Burgenland and in case of BEGAS following the position of regional socialist politicians who mainly opposed the alternative to the OMV, namely the EVN. It is in this context that the newspaper mainly addresses questions of energy supply, where the OMV generally is referred to as a reliable provider of natural gas – international trade is discussed marginally, however, with the Hungaria-Austria-pipeline being the exception in the 1990s. Regarding the self-presentation of the OMV in context of natural gas, which is achieved by comparably few advertisements, the company mainly focusses on an environmentally friendly presentation of natural gas and becomes a local actor by sponsoring various (sports) events.

The chosen method for this work proved to be suitable for the research question. However, the source material turned out to be rather shallow in relation to the inspected overlap of OMV-news and natural gas. Reflection on the method inevitably leads to the conclusion that the article is “symptomatic” for the analysis of large digitally available newspaper corpora: Here, the attempt to reconstruct the discursive social climate is evident, but this clearly also requires the inclusion of other sources, which in turn would go beyond the scope of the work. It is therefore obvious that the newspaper itself allows further research with an expansion or shift of the research topic, for example by expanding the analysis on all instances of the OMV regardless of natural gas or vice-versa, or a closer look at the regional gas company BEGAS as well, which generally turns out to be more present in the newspaper due to its regional relations.

Nevertheless, this paper concludes that the “small lens” BF presents the “big player” OMV in a rather positive light, focussing on its regional engagement rather than its national or international actions. In a way, this regional socialist newspaper proves that the search for and the consumption of fossil fuel like natural gas – topics of global significance – manifest themselves besides many other aspects of life in regional news, presenting big players through a small lens.

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9. Figures

Figure 1: Instances of the OMV and natural gas; source: prepared by author.

Figure 2: Regional news; source: prepared by author.

Figure 3: Mentions ÖMV/OMV 1956-2007; source: prepared by author.

Figure 4: Share of natural-gas-related texts per year; source: prepared by author.

Figure 5: Share of natural-gas-related texts per decade; source: prepared by author.

10. Addendum

Addendum 1: Category system for the Qualitative Content Analysis.

Category name	Category definition	Subcategory name	Subcategory definition
Regional news	The OMV is addressed in context of regional news.	Energy supply	The newspaper addresses questions of energy supply.
		Exploration	The newspaper reports on oil and gas explorations in Burgenland performed by the OMV.
		Cooperations/Shareholding	The newspaper reports on possible shareholding or cooperations between the OMV and other companies.
		Gas stations	Reports address regional gas stations operated by the OMV.
		Events	Representatives of the OMV appear in reports about (local) events.
Global/national news	The OMV is addressed in context of global or national news.	Trade	The newspaper reports on (international) trade in which the OMV is involved.
Environmental aspects	The OMV is mentioned in connection with environmental questions.	Refineries	The newspaper reports on refineries run by OMV.
Advertisements	The newspaper contains advertisements from the OMV.	Image	The advertisements focus on a positive image of the company.
Sponsoring	The OMV acts as a sponsor for events etc.	Offerings	The advertisements contain offerings or address ways of consume.
		Regional gas stations	Advertisements are provided by regional gas stations.
Economic news	The OMV is mentioned in context of economic news.	<i>(no differentiation necessary)</i>	
		<i>(no differentiation necessary)</i>	

Addendum 2: Qualitative Content Analysis – Summary of natural gas related texts.

Category name	Subcategory name	Instances	Summary
Regional news	Energy supply	17	53
	Exploration	16	
	Cooperations/Shareholding	14	
	Gas stations	4	
	Events	2	
Global/national news	Trade	9	10
	Refineries	1	
Environmental aspects		6	
Advertisements	Image	3	3
	Offerings	0	
	Regional gas stations	0	
Sponsoring		2	
Economic news		1	

Addendum 3: Qualitative Content Analysis – Full Version. Table kept by author.

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Zitation dieses Beitrages

Johannes Grabher, A Big Player Through a Small Lens. The OMV and Natural Gas Through an East Austrian Lens, in: *historia.scribere* 16 (2024), S. 99–121, <http://historia.scribere.at>, eingesehen 18.6.2024 (=aktuelles Datum).