Breaking the myth of neutrality?
Politics of National Regulatory Body in Nuclear Wasteland

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1. Introduction

• The Art of Government in nuclear wasteland is a social experiment

The recognition of the experimental character of the art of government could change the way actors perceive and envision their roles in nuclear wasteland.
1. Introduction

- For next decision-making steps, national regulatory body will stand out as key actor
  - Assessing the experimental technology
  - Framing the regulatory practices (safety guides, …)
  - With ‘go’ or ‘no go’ for siting decision.

This scientific decision will be a crucial political moment in the decision making processes for nuclear countries.
1. Key normative questions

• What are and should be the role(s) of national regulatory body in governing nuclear wastes?
  – “what role should scientists, who are professionnally committed to impartiality, expect to play in decisionmaking?” (Jasanoff 1990, 7)

• How may their performances act as catalysts of more democratic debates about collective futures?
  – How do this institution influence the legitimacy of NWM decision-making process, NWM program and more globally nuclear futures so far?
2. Dealing with (the myth of) neutrality
2. Research Scientist

What my mother thinks I do
What my friends think I do
What the gov’t thinks I do
What society thinks I do
What I think I do
What I really do

What about the national regulatory body?
2. What national regulatory bodies think they do

- Providing ‘independent’ and ‘impartial’ assessments and ‘neutral, ‘objective’ communication
  - Formally assessing the final industrial NWM project with a “go for siting” decision.
  - Assessing safety requirements only regarding the international safety levels and national safety guidelines
  - Having no suggestion power on the design of national NWM project

CCSN, (2018)
2. What regulatory bodies actually do

- Occupying a critical position by:
  - Imposing common visions of safety principles which are taken-for-granted in the nuclear establishment communities.
    - They are so naturalized and stabilized that they are difficult to open up again (e.g. practices of classification and its consequences, e.g. vision of passive safety).
  - Providing safety guides for NWMO that are hard law.
  - Attending numerous NWMO’s meetings in order to comment the design of geological disposal project.
2. Regulatory body assessment **has** politics

- Regulatory body practices and scientific standards are typically associated with a political preference about:
  - **Geological disposal** (the association of geological disposal and a particular type of waste)
  - **Passive safety** (Schröder et al. 2016)
2. Regulatory body assessment is politics

- National Regulatory bodies occupy a critical position within democratic spaces, from where they exert their power of influence.

- They sustain a particular form of ‘knowledge’, which:
  - is animated by particular values and visions of the future in technological societies
  - materializes in concrete safety guides and contributes to shaping NWM decision-making process.
3. Rendering the politics of regulatory body visible

- **Belgium**: «**Neutrality and non engagement**»
  - Refusing an pro-active role in the NWM decision-making process.
  - Their N regulation activities remain invisible and closed down to non-experts.

- **Canada**: «**Reactive engagement and institutionalized opened up moments**»
  - Advance publication of decisionmaking guidelines: Possibility to react/comment/question the safety guides during their building.
  - In practice, few NGO experts and NWMO regularly react to safety guides.
3. Rendering the politics of regulatory body visible

- France: Recently, “Experimental engagement in regulatory assessment processes”
  - Open decisionmaking procedures: Technical support of ASN (IRSN) opened up to local stakeholders.
  - What was the results of this more open advisory procedures?
4. Conclusion (1)

- Neutrality has worked as a ‘legitimating myth’ for regulatory body
  - to anchor regulatory body practices in evidence-based modes of policy-making.
  - It reinforces unequal distribution of power between the expert communities and non-experts.

Nevertheless, because sensitive and controversial NWM programs are experimental, the credibility of regulatory body is expected to be challenged in the coming years.
4. Conclusion (2)

• Should regulatory body decide to break with the myth of neutrality and fully acknowledge that their assessments have and are politics? Yes!

• Why?
  – It could potentially open up the regulatory assessment processes to the public (non-expert) eye.
  – It could potentially redistribute imperfectly and temporally power among experts and non-experts.
Thanks for you attention!
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Recent Publications:

• Pierre Delvenne and Céline Parotte, 2018 « Breaking the myth of neutrality: TA has politics, TA as politics », Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 8p.