

**Collectively building an operational monitoring system for geological disposal:  
A case of ‘lab participation’**

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Since the ‘participatory turn’, the non-expert public is increasingly engaging (and being engaged) in sociotechnical challenges related to nuclear waste management in various contexts and forms. Anchored in the Modern2020 project entitled “development and demonstration of monitoring strategies and technologies for geological disposal”, this paper critically examines the engagement of local citizen stakeholders in the RD&D of monitoring strategies and technologies. We argue that this is a case of ‘lab participation’ (Bogner, 2012) since the public involvement in this project is not initiated by a concerned public sphere, but has instead been requested and organized by experts working on monitoring RD&D. Professionally carried out under controlled conditions and remaining rather unlinked to public controversies, this form of public participation raises some questions about the nature and implications of this ‘laboratory-like’ form of participation. Drawing on the preliminary results of the Modern2020 project, this paper considers this public participation process in its substantive and procedural characteristics. As such, it addresses specific questions such as: ‘To what extent have the perceptions and opinions of the lay participants influenced the further technical development of monitoring strategies?’, ‘How can we assess the role of the social scientist responsible for initiating, organizing and running the citizens’ participation process while social-scientifically observing the participation experiment at the same time?’ and ‘How to consider the instances of contestation and protest within this controlled participatory environment?’.