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‘Invited’ public participation in the R&D of monitoring systems for geological disposal: critical assessment and recommendations

Ricomet Conference 2019, 2nd of July – Panel: Participation in radiological protection: from formal to informal (and back)

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Introducing the Modern2020 Project

- **General project aim:** Develop monitoring concepts and technologies to observe repositories for high level nuclear waste that will take into account the requirements of specific national contexts and public stakeholder expectations
- **Transdisciplinary EU project:** Project partners with techno-scientific expertise, social scientists, local public stakeholders (*BE, FI, SE & FR*)
- **Social Science – Research team:**
 - BE – University of Antwerp: Anne Bergmans, Axelle Meyermans, Pieter Cools, Anna-Laura Liebenstund and Céline Parotte
 - SE – University of Gothenburg: Göran Sundqvist, Hannes Lagerlöf



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Shaping stakeholder “engagement” within Modern2020

- **Monitoring as a ‘tool’**
 - Inform and engage local stakeholders
 - Build confidence (and acceptance of geological disposal)
- **Social scientists within Modern2020 - Very active role in shaping public engagement**
 - Establishing expert-public interactions on the ‘project level’
 - Discovering opinions on monitoring during ‘home engagement sessions’
 - 13 engagement activities with citizens from BE, FI, SE and FR
 - Online ‘Delphi’ survey (two rounds)
 - Workshop on expectations of monitoring and of public engagement in R&D
- **Experienced difficulties**
 - Convincing civil stakeholders to participate
 - Convincing experts to ‘open up’

Modern2020 as a case of 'lab participation'?

Bogner, A. (2012), The Paradox of Participation Experiments. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*. 37(5), 506-527

- **Participation as protest >< Lab participation**
 - No technology controversy (e.g. Monitoring)
 - Requested and initiated by technical experts / social scientists
 - Participation 'under controlled conditions' – decontextualization
 - Social-scientific observation of the experiment
- **Various questions arise:**
 - Does this form of participation offer a 'gain in rationality'? (cf. Bogner)
 - Possibilities for politicizing technology?
 - Role of the social scientists involved

What kind of local stakeholder engagement in R&D?

- **Conclusions from survey results:**
 - **Decisions about specific technical elements** should be left to technical experts
 - However, local stakeholder engagement remains important, because of
 - Right to **be informed**
 - Asking **critical questions**
 - **Encourage technical experts** to take local stakeholders' remarks, comments into account and to 'do the best job they can'
- **Yet, open questions remain:**
 - **Discrepancies** between local stakeholders and technical experts (and within each group)
 - Example: should local stakeholders be involved on the technical/engineering level of a specific R&D project?

Difficulties of participating in a European R&D project as a local stakeholder

- Were local stakeholders **included as true project partners?**

“We sometimes feel a bit like the ‘fifth wheel’. It feels that the project partners see it as a nice extra and legitimation that we are there, but we are not really involved.

(Belgian local stakeholder, WP2 workshop, Paris, March 2017)

- Connection with **practical issues:**
 - Language barrier
 - Planning and resources
- Carefully assess on what topics, in what phases and for what reasons citizen stakeholders should be engaged → **There must be something to negotiate!**

Thank you for your attention!

Questions, remarks?

