

Background

Our modern society is increasingly faced with challenges and problems that cannot be solved by a purely technical, political or social approach. Radioactive waste disposal site selection and management can be characterised as one of these challenges that require a transdisciplinary approach, integrating social, philosophical and ethical aspects in a 'technical' practice. Along the spirit of this transdisciplinary approach, and in order to ensure the necessary public support for a policy decision regarding this practice, stakeholder involvement is more and more seen as a necessary policy element in the decision making process. The aim is to achieve the broad involvement of individuals from civil society, with significant representation from local communities, elected representatives and NGO's, as well as scientists from outside radioactive waste management organisations, together with established players in the field, such as the implementers of radioactive waste management, public authorities, experts and waste producers.

Objectives

Several initiatives regarding stakeholder involvement in radioactive waste management have been taken already in Europe, as well in the research era as in 'the real world'. Among them was the EC FP6 COWAM2 project ('Community Waste Management 2 – Improving the Governance of Nuclear Waste Management and Disposal in Europe') that run from January 2003 to December 2006.

The objective of COWAM 2 was to contribute to the actual improvement of the governance of Radioactive Waste Management (RWM) in order to address the issue of geological waste disposal in Europe, by:

- Better addressing and understanding societal expectations, needs and concerns as regards radioactive waste decision making processes, notably at local and regional levels, taking advantage of the past and ongoing successful and unsuccessful experiences of RWM in the concerned European countries;
- Increasing societal awareness of and accountability for RWM at local, national and European levels, creating the conditions for an improved dialogue among representatives of civil society and the traditional public and private actors of RWM;
- Developing guidance on innovative democratic governance of RWM, integrating local, national and European levels of decision as well the key non technical and technical dimensions involved;
- Developing best practices and benchmarking on practical and sustainable decision making processes recognised as fair and equitable by the stakeholders involved at the local, national and European levels as well as consistent on the short, medium and long term of RWM;
- Contributing to enable European societies to make actual progress in the governance of RWM, in order to reach practicable, accountable and sustainable decisions.

SCK•CEN-PISA engaged in work packages on 'Implementing Local Democracy' (WP1), 'Long Term Governance' (WP4) and 'Integration and Knowledge Management' (WP5).

Principal results

Work under WP1 culminated in a 'Roadmap for Local Committee Construction'. This document offers no 'recipe' for local stakeholder involvement, but does reflect on the experiences coming from a number of countries (Belgium, Slovenia, Spain, Romenia, etc.). The document sets out the following themes which need to be considered when setting up a local stakeholder committee: the identity (from a relatively passive 'transmitter of information' to an 'active negotiator'), legitimacy (referring to formats of representation), financial arrangements (referring to sources of funding), organisational rules and procedures, communication policy (to 'outside audiences') and quality checking on the functioning of a local committee.

PISA researchers contributed to WP4 'Long term governance' by looking at aspects of ethics in relation to the process of long term governance. An extensive study on 'ethics of compensation and funding' looked at the value of an ethical code that would help decision-makers and experts adjusting nuclear waste management policy and practices to citizenship requirements. The study touched on issues such as transparency in public policy dealing with compensations and the integration of the common good into large interest's management for the future generations.

A second study elaborated on strengths and weaknesses of ethical values and principles throughout the long term governance process. We state that ethics is 'but one of the interactions' and that due to the inherent character of unpredictability, it is by definition impossible to speak or act in terms of 'intergenerational ethics' ('the future economics, sciences, politics and philosophy do not yet exist').

In WP5, SCK•CEN-PISA, serving as the 'national contact person' for the COWAM2 network, organised several meetings with the stakeholders involved in the regional siting processes in the frame of the low and intermediate level radioactive waste management policy of the Belgian authorities. The results emerging from these meetings were based on research questions formulated by the WP5 core group and were summarised in the 'Belgian National Insight report'.

Finally, in July 2006, SCK•CEN-PISA organised the COWAM2 closing seminar in Antwerp and Mol, and contributed (alongside to the work in the different work packages) by presenting a historical contextual analysis of RWM governance in Belgium and a state-of-the-art of the involvement of civil society according to the partnership methodology in the actual siting process of low- and intermediate short-lived radioactive waste in Belgium.

Future work

Since January 2007, SCK•CEN-PISA researchers are involved in three research projects within the EC 6th Framework Programme that aim to follow up on previous research with regard to stakeholder involvement in long term governance radioactive waste. Cowam in Practice (CIP) is the follow-up project of COWAM2. ARGONA (Arenas in Risk Governance) will look at how effective risk governance can be achieved by concretising how participation and transparency can be implemented in nuclear waste management programmes. Finally, OBRA will look at the needs, terms and conditions with regard to the establishment of a 'European Observatory for Long-term Governance on Radioactive Waste Management'.

Main contact person

Gaston Meskens, gaston.meskens@sckcen.be

Main references

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