

The German Site Selection Procedure for a Final Repository for High-level Waste – Characteristics of a Participatory, Self-reflecting and Learning Procedure

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Background: Nuclear Waste Governance

- site selection process described as „wicked“ sociotechnical problem
- traditional top-down governance failed (e.g. Gorleben)
- external factors like Fukushima affected attitude towards nuclear energy
- political „window of opportunity“
- participation is regarded as more than just a helpful tool
- Site Selection Act 2013 and Commission for the Disposal of High-Level Waste (2014-2016)

Sources: see e.g. ENTRIA 2019; Hocke/Kallenbach 2015; Brunnengräber et al. 2014; Mbah 2018.

The German Site Selection Procedure

- based on German Site Selection Act 2017 (StandAG 2017)
- pays more attention to participatory elements:
 - National Civil Society Board (NBG)
 - Subareas Conference
 - Regional conferences and council of regions
 - Informal participatory elements
- aim: implement a participatory, self-reflecting and learning procedure
- agency responsible for participation: Federal Office for the Safety of Nuclear Waste Management (BfE)

Research Project (2018-2020)

Title: „Public participation in the siting procedure for a final repository: challenges of a cross-generational, self-reflecting and learning procedure“

Working steps and context of results:

- development of a concept for participation
- analysis of regulatory framework and development of modules for a learning authority
- analysis of narratives on final disposal and development of future visions

Contracting authority: Federal Office for the Safety of Nuclear Waste Management (BfE)

Methodological approach

- research question: What kind of requirements does a learning procedure impose on the overall process and its institutions?
- juridical analysis of legal requirements and the scope for participatory elements
- literature review on elements of organizational learning combined with an empirical analysis on work modi of the BfE
 - problem description and design in cooperation with BfE
 - group discussions and qualitative interviews (with BfE-staff)
 - analysis and critical reflection of findings

Participatory and learning procedure? – Options, limitations and requirements

- prior informal participatory elements become formal by legal commitment
 - design is fixed
 - implementation of findings in decision-making still has to be defined
- informal participatory elements required
 - can be implemented by several actors
 - design is open
 - integration in decision-making process needs to be defined
- co-design of participatory procedure
 - between administrative authorities, politics, and stakeholders

Participatory and learning procedure? – Options, limitations and requirements

- limitations:
 - BfE as regulator and agency responsible for participation and steering of the process
 - democratic decision-making only in parliament, no veto-rights or referendum

- selected requirements for a learning procedure
 - various participation options for all interested actors
 - openness of all actors and
 - interaction and communication between actors on eye level
 - reflection of the process by continual evaluation

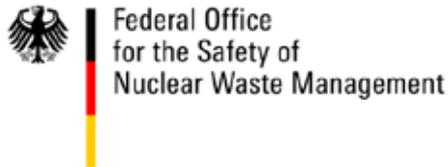
Sources: see e.g. Dryzek 2010; Geißel 2012; Smeddinck 2019/forthcoming.

Preliminary (indicative) conclusions

- need for a conceptual elaboration of terms like „self-reflecting“ and „learning“
- formal embeddedness of participatory elements needs clear messages according to empowerment
- enabling of participation regarding e.g. knowledge/information gaps, financial configuration, networks/actor cooperation and deliberation – reflecting the aim of democratization
- development of a positive error culture (and of ambitious narratives)

Thank you for your attention!

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