

DELEGATED DEMOCRACY

The Siting of Swedish Nuclear Waste

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Hanna Sofia Johansson

Abstract

The present study concerns the siting of Swedish nuclear waste. Four cases are examined: the feasibility studies in Nyköping and Tierp (cases 1 and 2), as well as three public consultation meetings with conservationist and environmental organisations, and two study visits to nuclear facilities in Oskarshamn and Östhammar, which were held during what is called the site-investigation phase (cases 3 and 4). The Swedish Nuclear Fuel and Waste Management Co (SKB) began the search for a nuclear waste site in the 1970s. Since 1992 SKB has conducted feasibility studies in eight municipalities, including in the four municipalities mentioned above. At the present time more comprehensive site investigations are underway in Oskarshamn and Östhammar, two municipalities that already host nuclear power plants as well as storages for nuclear waste. In addition to SKB and the municipalities involved in the site-selection process, politicians, opinion groups, concerned members of the public, and oversight bodies are important actors.

The analysis of the cases employs the concepts of “sub-politics”, “boundary work”, and “expertise”, together with the four models of democracy “representative democracy”, participatory democracy”, “deliberative democracy”, and “technocracy”. The aim of the study is to describe the characteristics of Swedish democracy in relation to the disposal of Swedish nuclear waste. The main questions of the study are: *Which democratic ideals can be found within SKB’s siting process during the feasibility studies and in the consultation process during the site investigations?* and *Which democratic ideals were influential during the feasibility studies and in the consultation process?* The study is based on qualitative methods, and the source materials consist of documents, interviews, and participant observations.

In summary, the form of democracy that emerges in the four case studies can be described as *delegated democracy*. This means that a large part of the political preparatory work is delegated from parliamentary actors and arenas to sub-political actors and arenas. At the same time, this form of democracy is

characterised by the final decisions being taken by elected representatives in the parliamentary arena. Most of the requisite information, however, is provided by a sub-political actor in sub-political arenas, as a result of the preparatory work having been delegated to SKB. This provision of information, however, is often intended to win support for SKB's activities. During the preparatory work, various forms of expertise are accorded great influence, while elected politicians, many of whom are laymen, have the final say in the decision making. This expert influence is also a consequence of the fact that the elected politicians have delegated the issue to a corporation and to opinion groups. The nuclear waste democracy is characterised by a division into two parts: on the one hand a process of deliberation between sub-political actors during the preparatory phase, and on the other a representative democracy in connection with decision-making. The large extent to which the preparatory work is delegated to sub-political actors, and the marginal degree of political decision making in parliamentary arenas are what make it possible to call this form of democracy *delegated democracy*. It will be of great future interest to study the government's public review process, investigation, and decision concerning SKB's application for a permit to construct a repository. First then will we learn the nature of the connection between the sub-political actors' preparatory work and the parliamentary actors' decision, or, put differently, we will then have a picture of how democratic the delegated handling of nuclear waste is.

Keywords: deliberative democracy, participatory democracy, representative democracy, technocracy, expertise, boundary work, sub-politics, nuclear waste, public consultation, Swedish Nuclear Fuel and Waste Management Co (SKB).

Science and Technology Studies, Department of Sociology,
University of Gothenburg
Box 720, SE-405 30 Göteborg, SWEDEN

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