

Partnering with stakeholders in radioactive waste management

by C. Pescatore and A. Vari*

Site selection for radioactive waste management (RWM) facilities draws considerable attention from implementers, government bodies, local communities and the public at large. Facility siting processes have generally tended to be marred by conflicts, disagreements and delays. In response, efforts have been made to shift from a more traditional “decide, announce and defend” model to one of “engage, interact and co-operate”. The essence of the new approach is co-operation or partnership between the implementer and the affected communities, involving dialogue between experts and citizens, mutual learning and public participation in the decision-making process. National ministries and authorities have also been called to and do play a more visible role. The intensity and degree of partnering can vary from country to country and in different phases of project development.

The FSC studies

In its first phase of work, the Forum on Stakeholder Confidence (FSC) synthesised countries’ experience in its report entitled *Learning and Adapting to Societal Requirements for Radioactive Waste Management*.¹ Partnership approaches in Belgium, Canada and Finland were cited as examples of helping to achieve a balance between the requirements of fair representation and competent participation. Other advantages of the partnership approach were: helping to achieve a combination of a licensable site and a management concept with host community support, and helping to achieve a balance between compensation, local control and development opportunities. Those observations are still valid today. Since then, arrangements for some type of partnership approach have been incorporated into the RWM strategies of most NEA member countries. Such approaches to decision making, relying in particular on a concept of joint ownership of both the problem and the solution, are increasingly being implemented with

success worldwide, including outside the radioactive waste management field.

A great variety of partnership arrangements exists based on the legal, institutional, political and cultural traditions within each country, the socio-economic characteristics of the affected communities and the specificities of the relevant national RWM programmes. The FSC is releasing a study² documenting how the approach to partnering has been or is being implemented in 13 countries, namely: Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Hungary, Japan, Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. Of particular interest in this study is that the waste management programmes considered are at very different stages and, in each case, actual experience in implementation reflects participatory measures during the stage of designing the siting procedure or during the first siting steps.

Empowering local communities

The composition of the partnership organisms and the tasks to be carried out by them may also vary widely. Organisational formats (permanent or temporary working groups, panels, etc.) as well as results or outputs of collaboration with affected communities (such as design plans and recommendations to an elected or administrative authority) may vary from legally binding agreements to less formal arrangements. They all underline nevertheless

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a determination to favour empowerment of communities in decisions that affect their future. Typically, partnership arrangements empower the local communities:

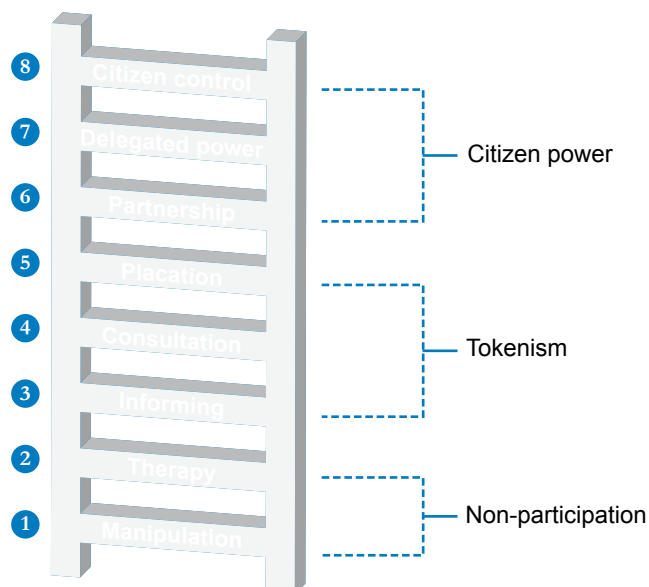
- to consult experts of their choice and to build up their own expertise in radioactive waste management;
- to provide authoritative recommendations to local, regional and national authorities;
- to influence the implementer's work in developing its waste management concept;
- to make meaningful suggestions for such elements as facility design features and infrastructure;
- to formulate plans for benefit packages that will profit their community in the short and long term on both social and economic grounds;
- to gather, assimilate and disseminate information on the implications of implementing a facility in their area;
- to stay abreast of research performed by the implementer, its consultants, the regulators and others;
- to monitor the performance of the various players and check their authenticity.

A necessary empowerment measure is that of community benefits. Several different and complementary types of benefits are found in partnership arrangements. Community engagement funding is an essential element of the partnership approach.

It is necessary for citizens to hire (or release) their own secretarial or technical support or experts (scientists, lawyers, etc.) as well as to cover operating expenses. Engagement funding is designed to enable the affected communities to participate meaningfully in the collaboration process. Additional social and economic benefits take potential impacts of, and opportunities created by, RWM facilities into account. These ensure financial resources to support short-term development and/or long-term quality of life in the community. These benefits underscore the recognition that the community is volunteering an essential service to the country.

Two supporting measures typically confer additional margin of choice to the community. With volunteerism, the governing body of a community expresses the community's interest in participating in a process aimed at determining the suitability of a site for radioactive waste management on its territory. Such an expression of interest may be in response to an invitation by the waste management organisation or by the government, or it may be an unsolicited offer. With right of veto, the community is allowed to withdraw its offer from consideration within a certain period of time. In some countries the right of veto is ensured by law; in other countries it is granted based on an informal agreement amongst the parties involved. Due to the disposal concept, a limited number of suitable sites or to legal and political conditions, the possibilities for implementing volunteerism or right of veto may be limited in some countries.

Figure 1: Arnstein's eight-rung ladder of citizen participation



Ten years on: a leap from tokenism to real participation

For the purpose of analysing trends in stakeholder involvement over the past decade, it is instructive to compare the national contributions to the current study with those reported in a similar survey³ of OECD countries that was carried out in the 1999-2002 time frame. The “ladder of citizen participation” proposed and elaborated by Arnstein⁴ in 1969 provides a relevant framework to compare approaches or to study evolution in public involvement (Figure 1).

The bottom rungs of the ladder are identified as ① “Manipulation” and ② “Therapy”. Both rungs describe levels of “non-participation”, whereby the real objective is only to enable decision makers to “educate” or to “cure” the public.

Rungs ③ and ④ (“Informing” and “Consultation”) increase the level of participation to that of “tokenism”, whereby the public is allowed to listen and to have a voice. Under these conditions, however, citizens still lack the power to ensure that their views will be taken into consideration. Rung ⑤, “Placation”, is a higher level of “tokenism” in that citizens are allowed to give advice but there is no guarantee that their ideas will have an influence on the decisions.

Further up the ladder are levels of citizen involvement with increasing degrees of decision-making power. Citizens can enter into a “Partnership” (Rung ⑥) that enables them to engage in negotiations with decision makers. At the highest levels of citizen participation, “Delegated power” (Rung ⑦) and “Citizen control” (Rung ⑧) refer to situations where citizens carry a majority stake in the decision or full executive power.

With reference to the Arnstein ladder, it can be observed that the focus on partnership revealed by answers to the 2008-09 survey is two rungs higher on the participation ladder than the focus on information and consultation revealed by the 1999-2002 survey, and represents an important leap from tokenism towards real participation. At the level of partnership, power is reapportioned through negotiation between citizens and decision makers. They agree to share planning and decision-making responsibilities through such structures as joint policy boards, planning committees and mechanisms for resolving impasses.

Overall observations

Important changes have taken place in citizen participation in radioactive waste management over the past decade. These changes can be summarised as follows:

- shift from information and consultation towards partnership, i.e. from token involvement to citizen influence and power;
- shift from a passive to an active role of local communities: from resigned acceptance to collaboration, volunteering and veto;
- development of a great variety of administrative formats for collaboration;
- recognition of the need for, and legitimacy of, community empowerment measures and socio-economic benefits;
- emergence of new ideals and bases for collaboration including mutual learning, adding values to the host community/region and sustainable development.

Involving local actors in the design of the facility and community benefits are likely to result in solutions that will add value to the host region. In all cases, social capital is augmented as local stakeholders develop new skills and increase their knowledge about the interests and ideals of their community. Implementers and other institutional players also improve themselves as responsive actors in the governance of radioactive waste and as responsible neighbours concerned with the well-being of the host region. ■

References

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