

Nuclear Energy in Europe: A Public Technology

Stathis Arapostathis (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece)

Helmuth Trischler, Robert Bud

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Nuclear in the East: Between Soviet and National Nuclearity

- “Russian normalcy”: linkage of nuclear power with the upgrade of the standard of living and the population’s wellbeing and economic development.
- Nuclear Power and the Socialist Transformation
- Economy and Geopolitics: Major concerns in public discourses and public representations
- No mention to risk and vulnerability
- Emphasis on the dominance of technocratic problem solving strategies, engineering rationality and Soviet capabilities
- Nuclear power plants: symbols of national pride and identity

- Lithuania: The Ignalia power station (early 1980s) the result of the contribution of working class people under the coordination, supervision and direction of Soviet power.
- Glorifying the triumph of communist science and technology was intermingled with technonationalism.
 - Kozloduy was publicly represented as an expression of Bulgarian technological achievement and capacities.

The Public Shaping of Nuclear Energy in the West

- Economic Rationalism v Ambivalence and Fear
- Public Fear and Reactions for the possibility of massive programmes of nuclear weapons
 - In Germany in 1956, local resistances and reactions to the plans of the government of North Rhine-Westphalia to locate its newly founded nuclear research centre in the forests close to Cologne
- Alternative modernisms: rise of environmental movements and a more sceptical attitude towards technological progress
 - Change the design of power plant: filter chambers in Barsebäck in the far South of Sweden

Anti-nuclear Movement

- National & Transnational: Patterns of public protest crossed national borders
- Anti-nuclear actors cooperated internationally, exchanged experiences, discussed strategies and jointly experimented with new practices to counter the nuclear establishment. Significant transfer of ideas between ecological movements worldwide.
- Mediators: Activists and Politicians
- Anti-nuclear movement and International Associations as part of European integration.

Public Responses to Chernobyl

- Europe saw a variety of different appropriations of the accident.
 - Netherlands postponement
 - Sweden phase out
 - France: crisis of institutions; new institutions: counter expertise
- Common characteristic: revival of anti-nuclear movements and attitudes in the West.
- In the post-Soviet democracies the repercussions of the event varied and they were combined with the implications of the collapse of the USSR that triggered further concerns and reactions.
 - Belarus: Soviet engineering and technical integrity was questioned; It influenced the internal politics and the accident was closely related to a significant political transformation in the country beginning with independence, political and social mobilization

Conclusion

- Dominant Public Representation: Modernity, Industrialization and Progress & Nuclear Energy
 - West Europe: nuclear power as a “new industrial revolution”,
 - East Europe: nuclear power as necessary to achieve an ideal communist society through heavy industrialization and energy abundance
- Institutions (scientific institutions, political parties and transnational social movements) matter
- Critical events like accidents tested the trustworthiness of institutions.
- Resilient imaginary that links development and “progress” with nuclear: Revitalization of nuclear power in the early years of the 21st century in a variety of nation-states.