



Supplement of

Last century's German citizens' dialogue on nuclear energy revisited: new lessons learnt?

Jan-Henrik Meyer and Britta Oertel

Correspondence to: Jan-Henrik Meyer (jhmeyer@gmx.de)

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Last Century's German Citizens' Dialogue on Nuclear Energy revisited: New Lessons learnt?

Britta Oertel, Jan-Henrik Meyer

Bürgerdialog Kernenergie (1974-1983) – Staatliches Handeln in der Auseinandersetzung um die nukleare Entsorgung und seine Bedeutung für das heutige Standortauswahlverfahren

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DIALOGIK



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1. What was the Bürgerdialog Kernenergie?

- An **information and discussion campaign** of the Federal Government
 - mid-1970s until early 1980s
- Initiated by a joint resolution
 - Federal Government and
 - Prime Ministers of the German States
- Responsible: **Federal Minister for Research and Technology (BMFT)**
 - Primary concern: **security of supply**
 - to secure investment in nuclear energy and energy supply in the face of the...
 - oil crisis, rising energy consumption and, above all, increasing public protests
 - Secondly: **public acceptance**
 - Initially of nuclear power plants
 - subsequently reprocessing, final storage
- In the **spirit of Willy Brandt**:
 - “Daring to be more democratic”, also on technology issues
 - Participation (or at least debate):
 - allowing critics and supporters to have their say.

Two priority areas: national and regional

Initially:
Nationwide on nuclear energy (and increasingly alternative sources, too)



From 1979:
Gorleben area in Lower Saxony:
nuclear waste disposal centre site



Objectives

- to provide **comprehensive information** on the advantages and disadvantages of nuclear energy use and on the Federal Government's position
- to give **all groups**, including critics and opponents, the opportunity to put their *arguments up for discussion*;
- to encourage the **social groups** - churches, political parties, trade unions, citizens' initiatives - to **engage in information and discussion** with the citizen **independently** but with the technical and financial support of the BMFT
- to discuss the question of **nuclear energy** use in the **overall context**:
How do we want to live in the future?

(Abridged and translated from Hauff 1977 'Social Democratic Press Service': 1f.
Emphasis is ours, BO, JHM)

Spotlight on implementation

Bundesminister Hans Matthöfer antwortet auf kritische Fragen

Brauchen wir Kernenergie? Wir haben doch Kohle und Erdgas!

Die Berechnungen der Fachleute sagen: Die Erdöl- und Erdgasvorräte reichen noch 40 oder 50 Jahre. Die Kohlevorräte um ein Vielfaches größer sind und unseren Energieverbrauch noch sehr viel länger decken. Wir dürfen aber unsere Kohle nicht nur verbrennen, sondern auch durch sie, z.T. in flüssiger Form, Erdöl und Erdgas als Treibstoff und als Rohstoffe für die chemische Industrie zu ersetzen. Diese Entwicklung wird durch die Bundesregierung gefördert. Zur Erzeugung von Elektrizität müssen rechtzeitig neue Energiequellen gefunden werden. Sonnenenergie wird einen Teil des Bedarfs decken können. Es bleibt aber ein wachsender Bedarf an Energie. Je länger wir die Erschließung neuer Energiequellen hinauszögern, um so schwerwiegender wird sich der Energieengpass auswirken.



An den Bundesminister für Forschung und Technologie, Hans Matthöfer, Bonn 12, Postfach 5300, Bonn 12, Postfach

Betreff: Bürgerdialog Kernenergie

Senden Sie mir bitte das Taschenbuch „Kernenergie“ (2.).

Ich möchte an einem Informations-Seminar teilnehmen. Überföhrten des hier angegeben.

Name: _____

Strasse: _____

Wohnort: _____

Eine Information des Bundesministers für Forschung und Technologie Hans Matthöfer



KERNENERGIE

Eine Bürgerinformation

Energiediskussion Energiediskussion

Informationen – Argumente – Meinungen 3/80 August 1980

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Bürgerdialog Kernenergie mit neuen Schwerpunkten

Mit Vertretern aller gesellschaftlicher Gruppen (Parteien, Gewerkschaften, Kirchen, Industrie und Wirtschaft, Jugend- und Studentenorganisationen sowie Bürgerinitiativen und Umweltschutzverbänden) hat Forschungsbund Minister Voiker Hauff in Bonn ein weiteres Gespräch über Stand und Perspektiven des Bürgerdialogs „Kernenergie und ihre Alternativen“ geführt.

Im Auftrag der Bundesregierung führt das Bundesforschungsministerium seit fünf Jahren eine öffentliche Informations- und Diskussionsaktion zum Problembereich Kernenergie und ihre Alternativen durch. Hauff kündigte an, daß der Bürgerdialog zusätzliche Schwerpunkte im Bereich der Gesamtköologie und der sozialen Folgewirkung neuer Energietechnologien aufgenommen werden. Auch die Diskussionsveranstaltungen über Umweltbelastungen großer Kohleveredlungsanlagen werde zu den neuen Schwerpunkten des Bürgerdialogs zählen.

An den Prinzipien, unter denen der Bürgerdialog über Kernenergie ablaufen soll, wolle er auch künftig festhalten. In der jedes sachliche und ehrliche Argument eine Chance liege, die man selbst nicht teilt.

Es gehe ferner darum, den allgemeinen politischen Stellenwert der Kernenergie-Diskussion für grundlegende Fragen der weiteren wirtschaftlichen und gesellschaftlichen Entwicklungen zu verdeutlichen.

Hauff hob hervor, daß die Beteiligung der Öffentlichkeit in diesem Jahr alle Erwartungen übersteige. Die Zahl der von einzelnen Gruppen geplanten Informations- und Bildungsveranstaltungen zum Energiethema sei um ein Mehrfaches gestiegen.

Die Bundesregierung, so Hauff, werde alles dafür tun, diesen Diskussionsprozeß qualitativ und quantitativ weiterhin zu verfestigen. Er sehe in der breiten Beteiligung der Bürger an diesem Such-, Bewertungs- und Entscheidungsprozeß „einen wesentlichen und unverzichtbaren Bestandteil unserer demokratischen Gemeinschaft“.

Citizens' Dialogue: Almost forgotten today

- Despite being the first major attempt at citizen participation in Germany, it is **almost forgotten** today.
- Despite its high-minded goals, the Citizens' Dialogue had **generally a bad image – in many contemporary publications**
- **A lacuna in the academic literature**
 - the Citizens' Dialogue on Nuclear Energy is **hardly reflected**.
 - Usually, the Bürgerdialog Kernenergie is dealt with in a **few sentences**.
 - Facts are routinely **misrepresented**.
 - Academic copy-paste:
 - Statements are obviously **taken over** from earlier publications with **no primary research**

**We are convinced that
we have been able to close
research gaps
to a large extent.**

How did we research past public engagement?

- **Research questions:**

1. What were the **origins** and who were the **protagonists** of the citizens' dialogue on nuclear energy?
2. What were the underlying **assumptions** and **goals**?
3. What were the **results expected**, and to what extent were they **achieved**?
4. Which **measures** and **instruments** were applied?
5. How was the citizen's dialogue **perceived by different actors**?

How did we research past public engagement?

1. **Archival research**

1. State archives: Federal government, Federal states, local archives
2. Non-state archives: Social movement archives e.g. Gorleben archive, church archives

2. **Library research**

1. Academic literature: 1970s-today, including PhD theses
2. Grey literature (from libraries and archives)

3. **Oral history interviews: 10 eyewitnesses**

1. Officials
2. Activists

Spotlight on Findings

1. Where did the measure break new ground?

- **No new technology without participation:**
 - Conviction of the political leadership of the BMFT that citizens should have a say in major technical projects
- Attempt to involve social movements and, in particular, citizens' initiatives and environmental groups
- Activities of some, by far not all, public officials, and throughout the entire project period
 - for serious dialogue with citizens' initiatives or citizens in the Gorleben region
 - to make critics' and opponents' voices heard in the debate
 - to place the discussion on the use of nuclear energy in a broader economic, technical, social context
- Active, large-scale dissemination of fact-based information materials
- Information events under the responsibility of non-governmental associations and citizens' initiatives.

2. Where did the cooperation with critics succeed, where did it fail?

- The citizens' dialogue did not take place in a vacuum, but in an **environment of divergent interests, activities and expectations**
- Critics, even critical experts, by many were not perceived as equals, but often even as a nuisance
- Steps to establish equality of financial and information resources, access to commissioned expert opinions were hardly ever taken
- ...but there was often bias on the part of the critics as well

3. Which obstacles did the campaign face?

- **Ambiguity between advertising, information and debate**
 - Increasing acceptance among the population was not achieved
 - The national government was not acting and was not perceived as neutral
 - Undermined credibility of the action
- **Term ‚Citizens‘ Dialogue‘ evoked far-reaching expectations**
 - Regarding participation – in decision making and openness to results
 - Despite clear statements by ministry regarding representative democracy
- **Interactive effects: Trust undermined**
 - By earlier and parallel advertising campaigns by utilities, industry
 - By condescending experts and deficit hypothesis-based attitudes
- **Lack of broad-based support in parliament**
 - Budget cuts by the Federal Parliament from 1979
 - Unresolved search for final repository and rising doubts whether nuclear energy expansion is democratically feasible
- **Public opinion and political decisions remained driven by major political events or technical disasters, not by informed debate.**

4. Where and to what extent did it achieve its goals, where did it fail?

- **Creating acceptance?**
 - No turning the tide in favour of acceptance of nuclear energy
- **Creating knowledge and debate?**
„a new enlightenment“ (Radkau 1986: 307)
 - Raised attention for the issue
 - Workshops and events helped trigger information and debate
 - Contributed to resource mobilisation for civil society
 - Enhanced level of reflexion and engagement with nuclear energy
 - In line with Joachim Radkau (1986: 307) on the nuclear controversy:
 - **„a real discourse, the largest and most thoughtful public discourse in the history of the Federal Republic so far“**
 - But the contribution of the citizens' dialogue cannot be quantified or even estimated
 - The citizens' dialogue itself rarely became prominent in public or in the media topic.

Finally: What to learn for future public engagement in nuclear waste governance?

- 1. Hard to learn from cases past**
 - Contextual conditions very different
 - Nature of conflict, media, attitudes, etc.
- 2. Deficit hypothesis-based assumptions undermined campaign**
 - More information may mean more critical population, rather than acceptance
 - Experts' condescending attitudes and behaviour antagonised citizens
- 3. Regional dynamics**
 - Intensive experiences with citizen dialogue and other events in the Gorleben region interplayed
- 4. Information campaigns may fail**
 - too many factors beyond control (complexity)