

Paper title: Nuclear waste, an unsolvable dilemma? Difference of temporality in politics and the nuclear fuel life cycle”

Abstract:

Nuclear energy has been controversial from the onset of its introduction. Propagators of nuclear energy claims this technology might solve the need for sustainable economic growth, since nuclear energy does not create carbon emissions. Critics, on the other hand, points to the dangers of nuclear weapons, and the disastrous consequences accidents bring. In this paper, I highlight one aspect of nuclear technology that exemplary demonstrates the dilemmas connected to evaluate benefits, costs and risks from nuclear technology: how to handle nuclear waste?

The specific features of nuclear waste handling create challenges in the decision making process, i.e. the extreme half-life of nuclear fuel waste – for some substances thousands of years. How can decision makers and the public calculate and debate benefits, costs and risks in this context? To grasp the challenges, I will analyze the topic by introducing Reinhart Koselleck’s concept of time and temporality. Koselleck’s concepts highlight how time horizons and people’s perception of time vary. Appropriated on nuclear waste, these concepts can shed light on the discrepancies in time horizons between the political sphere and its electoral temporality, the nuclear reactors lifespan temporality and the nuclear fuel life cycle temporality. In order to do this, I provide a case study on nuclear waste handling from Norway. Since 1948, Norway have created and sustained nuclear test reactors. Although the nuclear research has provided a variety of benefits, the handling of nuclear waste today gives the state headache in form of costly and difficult pressing decisions to be taken.