Lost in Translation: Czech Dialogues by Swedish Design

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Abstract

This study explores the journey of a model for stakeholder involvement called RISCOM. Originally developed within the field of radioactive waste management in Sweden, it was later used in the Czech Republic to re-establish public dialogue in the process of siting a geological repository. This case offers an opportunity to empirically study the fragility and ambiguous results of organized spread of public involvement across various domains of technological innovation and national contexts. We show how three circumstances – (1) the ambition to make RISCOM an internationally used model for public dialogue, (2) the specific situation in the Czech siting process, and (3) the short-lived and limited success of the subsequent Czech dialogues by Swedish design – were intrinsically related and sustained each other. Better understanding of such complexities might contribute to a more realistic attitude toward technologized democracy, i.e., toward practices of public deliberation increasingly becoming instrumental, transferable, and depoliticized.

Keywords: socio-technical controversy, public dialogue, nuclear waste management, sociology of translation

Introduction

Transferring an elaborate design to a different setting and putting it into use out of its original context is an intricate business with uncertain results. We take this well-known STS lesson (Bijker and Law, 1992; De Laet and Mol, 2000; Nielsen and Jensen, 2013) as a starting point for our case study on stakeholder involvement. We discuss how an established participatory procedure is made to travel from one national context to another. We are interested in how the 'technology' itself

is being transformed or *translated* during its displacement. Thus, we mobilize the relatively well-established imagery of technology transfer for the purpose of studying how formalized public involvement models are being spread across the EU. We argue that potential consequences of these activities can be problematic in specific ways. Namely that technologies of participation, transferable from country to country under supervision of participatory experts, may easily contribute to instrumentalization, depoliticization, and emptying of deliberative politics.

To make this argument empirically grounded, we present and critically discuss the story of how a Swedish design for public dialogue called RISCOM[1] was transferred to the Czech Republic. RISCOM, as a set of principles and recommendations for structured and transparent communication among stakeholders, was originally shaped during public debates on geological repositories of high-level nuclear waste in Sweden. After some time it entered the international arena: as part of several European projects it was proposed to facilitate – and democratize – siting processes related to planned geological repositories in the Czech Republic and other East European countries. We will show that, on the one hand, RISCOM made an important achievement in the Czech case, since it helped to bring all the main actors to a discussion table after previous negotiations had completely crashed. On the other hand, RISCOM failed from a broader and more subtle perspective. Its application contributed to the subsequent shift toward more authoritative decision-making and another crisis of mutual trust in the Czech repository siting process.

The case study on RISCOM was part of a broader collective work on the European Commission (EC) funded research project InSOTEC.[2] Our data consist of documentation, interviews with key actors, and observations of various meetings and events. Data relating to the Czech Republic were collected by Zdeněk Konopásek and Karel Svačina and the Swedish data were collected by Linda Soneryd. RISCOM was first implemented in the Czech Republic within an EC funded project Arenas for Risk Governance (ARGONA, 2006-2009). Soneryd was involved in the ARGONA project studying the development of RISCOM in

Sweden (see Elam et al., 2008). The implementation of RISCOM in the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia was also an element of yet another EC-funded project Implementing Public Participation Approaches in Radioactive Waste Disposal (IPPA, 2011-2013). Several participants in the IPPA project were also members of the InSOTEC research team. On the one hand, the existence of this concurrent implementation project provided us with many useful exchanges and experiences. On the other hand it situated us into a rather delicate situation. By critically analysing the efforts to implement RISCOM in the Czech Republic, we were necessarily and openly putting in question some key aspects of these EC-funded efforts. Despite this, all the concerned colleagues were willing to talk and discuss. We very much appreciate their collaboration under such circumstances.

On translation and treason

We suggest that the Czech dialogues by Swedish design need to be assessed against complexities that unfold before our eyes as soon as the process of transferring RISCOM from one setting to another is understood as its *translation*. The concept of translation is a crucial part of the vocabulary associated with actor-network theory, ANT (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1986) and with ANT-inspired studies of technology transfer in particular (e.g. Law, 2006). Simply put, actor-network theory helps to understand how success or failure – in terms of truth, continuity, durability, resistance or reality – is practically and specifically achieved. How is it that things come to work? More specifically, in relation to the problem of technology transfer, how does it happen that some technology is effectively transmitted to a new setting? The general ANT-like answer is: because it was translated. In relation to our specific subject, to articulate RISCOM anew, in a new setting, means articulating it differently.[3] The issue is not that one simply has to adapt the transferred technology to meet new conditions and requirements. The process of translation always involves "displacement, drift, invention, mediation" and the creation of links "that did not exist before" that modify ele-

ments or agents since they are combined in new ways (De Laet and Mol, 2000; Latour, 1994: 32).

Thus, by definition, there is no transportation without transformation. It does matter, however, what specific transformations occur and how. Translation can be good or bad, better or worse. Faithful or unfaithful. Processes of translation always in some sense entail betrayal or treason (Galis and Lee, 2014; Law, 1999), more or less. We can therefore talk about failure. Or success – if the translation is done well.[4] In our case, for instance, the communication model transferred to the Czech settings may or may not function in the same (expected) way as the 'original' Swedish RISCOM. Or, eventually, the involved actors may even start doubting to what extent the object in their hands metamorphosed into something else, into a completely different procedure deserving its own name and identity.

Thus, locating a technology in a new context is a complex and risky movement, involving subtle transformations, by necessity not only of the travelling object itself, but also of those who want to make it travel and those who want to use it in the new settings (Callon, 1986). The perspective of translation allows us to look at the case of RISCOM's transfer with an understanding of its complexities and ambivalences. We believe that such an understanding is important for a critical, and yet constructive analysis of contemporary participative practice. Moreover, following the intricate trajectories of the RISCOM story offers a specific opportunity. With the help of the concept of translation, we hope to avoid picking up perhaps the easiest possible explanation of what happened to RISCOM on the way to the Czech Republic, namely that a well-established element of democratic culture was simply confronted with the underdeveloped (post-communist) political culture in the target country.[5] Although such an explanation would not completely miss the point, it would definitely miss the opportunity for a broader lesson about stakeholder involvement – about what happens when it becomes a piece of political technology, eventually transferable across borders and various settings.[6]

Spreading public involvement models: Technologizing democracy

Stakeholder involvement and public participation has become a yardstick for the quality and legitimacy of governance across a number of policy domains.[7] Celebrated in general, participation nonetheless attracts critical attention of contemporary analysts (e.g., Irwin, 2006; Sundqvist, 2014; Wynne, 2007). In our paper we join these critical examinations by focusing on how the expansion of forms for invited participation like RISCOM can turn public involvement into a predominantly technical issue.

This 'technological' aspect of participation is of course nothing new. No matter that conflicts intrinsically belong to politics (Hirschman, 1994) and that a conflict often directly precedes, as a triggering event, the introduction of professionally orchestrated deliberative exercises, invited public involvement is often framed as attempts at *neutralizing, avoiding or preventing controversies* (Kleinman et al., 2011). The organizers of these events expect from them that they would serve as lubricants with the help of which the entire decision-making machinery runs smoother and less contested. Public deliberation then gets emptied from its political nature. Indeed, it gets depoliticized. As noted by Andrew Barry (2001: 7), "the deployment of technology is often seen as a way of avoiding the noise and irrationality of political conflict" – and this is true even for technologies of participation.[8]

The idea of technologized public deliberation events significantly relates to what Alexander Bogner (2012) terms 'lab participation': "a form of participation organized by professional participation specialists, taking place under controlled conditions and largely without reference to public controversies, political participation demands, or individual concerns" (Bogner, 2012: 510). Lab participation is characterized by being often organized in the context of a research project and funded by a third party, and by being very well-documented. Since respective events neither have been initiated or framed by public concerns nor have any impact on decision-making and seldom invite grassroots activists or NGOs, they are said to "bear practically no relation to the world outside" (Bogner, 2012: 511). According to Bogner, lab-

participation has deeply paradoxical and not quite convincing results. Bogner's concept is particularly relevant for us, since a 'laboratory' character of RISCOM, as we will explain soon, was explicitly formulated as one of its founding characteristics. In other words, RISCOM was *intended* and specifically designed as lab participation – and as such, with real effects in the political realm. Our case may therefore be taken as an opportunity to elaborate Bogner's arguments and specify them further.

The laboratory nature of the RISCOM model

The background ideas of RISCOM are inspired by a simplified version of Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action in combination with elements of organizational theory (Espejo, 2007). The design is based on a set of principles[9] and practical recommendations[10] for making communication between stakeholders structured, transparent and meaningful. Among other things, it establishes a 'Reference Group' and a 'Working Group' within the Reference Group. All the participants, i.e., the project team and members of the Reference Group, have to sign agreements that oblige them to comply with the RISCOM principles.

RISCOM is therefore rather similar to many other recommendations for public dialogues about controversial issues. It is unique, however, by certain laboratory qualities, explicitly formulated and often emphasized by its authors. Since the beginning, it has been crucial for the RISCOM design that the involved parties feel that it is safe to enter the dialogue. To achieve such an effect, RISCOM tries to create a specific deliberative "neutral arena" (Andersson and Wene, 2006), which has the form of a *contained* environment, established *temporarily* by the organizers to get the participants *dis-connected* from real-life politics and decisions. Within this laboratory space, participants commit themselves to act as equals, united by the respect toward 'fair dialogue'. By means of such dialogue participants expose themselves to a challenging, and yet friendly mutual stretching. With the help of stretching "the force of the better argument" should become manifest and participants' perspectives may eventually get enriched,

shifted or even shaken. After RISCOM finishes its work, the stakeholders return to the realm of political struggle *subtly transformed* by the experience of a 'politically neutral' dialogue, in which everything can be freely expressed, without the constraints of specific political tasks or interests (e.g. Andersson et al., 2011).

To sum up, the specific value of RISCOM is based on the idea that it allows what ordinary political engagement does not allow: unconstrained exchange of arguments and views between equals. We could therefore understand RISCOM as a true and *explicit* lab-participation experiment in Bogner's (2012) terms. Temporary detachment from real politics is, in fact, the main and even acknowledged effective force here, at least in theory.

The Swedish life of RISCOM

Nuclear waste management in Sweden[11] has enjoyed a reputation of being more open and participatory than in many other countries (Dawson and Darst, 2006). During the 1980s, however, the search for a suitable place for nuclear waste disposal was a technocratic endeavour insensitive to citizens in the concerned municipalities (Elam and Sundqvist, 2011). With the aim to gain more knowledge of the Swedish bedrock SKB (Swedish Nuclear Fuel and Waste Management co) made studies that included drilling, without the consent of the municipalities and with very insufficient information given to the population. This resulted in fierce local protest and the implementer SKB had to stop the drillings before the investigations were completed. It was impossible for the nuclear waste company to continue with its investigations and SKB changed its strategy to a 'voluntary approach' (Elam et al., 2010): in 1992 the company sent a letter to all municipalities and asked if they were welcome to make site-investigations. The letter made clear that the municipalities that allowed the company to make feasibility studies were neither obliged to agree to further investigations nor to host a nuclear waste disposal facility.

Around the same time the government authorities (the Swedish inspectorate for nuclear activities, SKI, and the Swedish Radiation Protection Agency, SSI) made their own interpretation

of the situation. The local protests had created a stalemate in the siting process, and it was obvious that ensuring the quality of the bedrock was not enough: acceptance was equally crucial. This insight made the government authorities turn to dialogue. With the aim to explore what a siting process could look like that all actors could perceive as legitimate, the Swedish inspectorate for nuclear activities started the Dialogue project, which was a direct predecessor to the RISCOM model (SKI, 1993a; 1993b).

The Dialogue project took place over a few years in the beginning of the 1990s. It involved environmental organisations, municipalities and government authorities and it was organized as a simulated review process of an application concerning the final disposal of nuclear waste, seeking permission to construct a final disposal system (SKI, 1993a). SKI funded the project, hoping that it could lead to a common view around the decision-making process and a credible review process in the future.

The government authorities then continued to refine a design for dialogue through two research projects. RISCOM I (1996-1998) explored how nuclear waste management could be more transparent and engaged basically the same people that were involved in organizing the Dialogue project. RISCOM II was an EC funded research project (2000-2003) and involved testing the design for public dialogue on radioactive waste management in other countries. A few years later RISCOM guided public dialogue on another highly controversial issue – the planning and building of a new infrastructure for mobile telephone communication (Soneryd, 2008; Lezaun and Soneryd, 2007).

After this short excursion into a non-nuclear issue, the RISCOM model found its way back to nuclear waste again, when the Nuclear Waste Council decided to set up a Transparency programme during the late phases of the site selection phase. The aim of these hearings was to open up questions of relevance for long-term safety that had been little discussed at the public consultations organised by the nuclear waste company SKB, for example the question of alternative technical concepts.

Overall, RISCOM and related dialogue forms have been relatively marginal to nuclear waste management in Sweden (Elam et al., 2008; Elam et al., 2010). Although the government authorities SKI and SSI have approached stakeholder involvement rather openly from 1990s and onwards, the nuclear waste company SKB has not shown much interest in RISCOM. The limits of the dialogue can be also seen in the lack of direct impact on real decision-making. Even if some of the RISCOM activities – for example the Transparency Programme organized by the Swedish Nuclear Waste Council (2007-2010) – did raise some challenging issues, they never seriously challenged the pre-eminent position of SKB's RD&D programme (cf. Elam and Sundqvist, 2009).

RISCOM travelling to the Czech Republic

The RISCOM model came to the Czech Republic in the middle of a governmental moratorium on the process of siting geological disposal. This moratorium was declared in 2004, after previous negotiations had failed.[12] The state agency RAWRA and the Nuclear Research Institute were invited to become participants in an EC project ARGONA (2006-2009), headed by the Swedish author of RISCOM.[13] One of the main aims of this project was to "test and apply approaches to transparency and participation by making explicit what it would mean to use the RISCOM model and other approaches within different cultural and organizational settings" (see ARGONA, project summary, undated).[14] In order to achieve this, a 'Reference group' was established in 2008. The group brought together various stakeholders from state organizations, municipalities, and NGOs.

The moratorium was concluded by an international conference called "Towards geological disposal without conflict" organized by RAWRA in November 2009. This event represented a 'turn' in the approach of RAWRA as the key implementing state organization. After technocratic measures, protests and moratorium, emphasis was now put on negotiation and dialogue. Representatives of RAWRA started to emphasise that without the consent of the municipalities, they would not go forward with site investigations. RISCOM and the

ARGONA project were quite important topics at the conference: several speakers appreciated their role in the Czech Republic, and called for continuing similar activities.

In about a year after the ARGONA project ended the RISCOM Reference Group found a successor: a national "Working Group for dialogue about geological disposal" (WG) was established. It was initiated by RAWRA as an advisory body of the Ministry of Industry and Trade, seemingly outside the experimental logic introduced by the original RISCOM. But it was in many respects similar to the former Reference Group and already during its first meeting it was suggested that the WG might become associated with a new EC-funded project, IPPA, which was just being prepared and for which the implementation of RISCOM in several post-communist European countries was a key task (Andersson et al., 2011; see also IPPA, undated). Although some members of the group did not necessarily have to be fully familiar with or even aware of RISCOM (research interview, 2012), WG's key representatives clearly considered the WG as a direct successor of the ARGONA project's Reference Group and as a part of RISCOM (and IPPA) activities in the Czech Republic (research interviews, 2011, 2012). Also according to the official IPPA report, "The Working Group was founded on the RISCOM principles" (Vojtěchová and Steinerová, 2013: 2) and RISCOM became the engine of the entire dialogue among stakeholders in the Czech siting process (Vojtěchová and Steinerová, 2013: 22).[15] The WG had therefore two faces, unreflectively combined together.[16] It was to offer a RISCOM-like *safe space* – an environment where the participants could "meet, peacefully, without any extra goals... that could restrain or push the participants" (research interview, 2011). At the same time, however, members of the group tried to develop the agenda of an advisory body (commenting legislation and policy materials).

The WG met eleven times between 2010 and 2013. However, already in 2011 there seemed to be growing frustration among members of the WG. Mayors of concerned municipalities increasingly felt that the entire dialogue had become empty and just for show. The Ministry of Industry and Trade was showing more and more neglect toward what was happening inside the WG,

which was repeatedly noted with uneasiness in minutes from WG's meetings. While mayors often expressed their dissatisfaction relatively openly, similar attitudes were tacitly developing among the Ministry people too, which became fully manifested later on.

As a result, participants in the WG increasingly started to act beyond the group's framework, which only contributed to mutual frustration. Both mayors and NGO people complained that even if an agreement on something is achieved within the WG, it does not mean anything since it is sooner or later rolled over by informal backstage negotiations outside the WG. But they themselves started communicating outside the WG too, like in earlier times, for example by means of a separate and confidential e-mail list. In this communication some of the opposing mayors called the body a "Potemkin's group". The WG simply began eroding and overflowing on several sides. Nevertheless, the integrity of the WG was still kept by the repeated claim of RAWRA that it would not proceed with the planned site investigations against the will of concerned municipalities. This was taken as a key guarantee that 'fair dialogue', however ineffective and emptied, would continue. At the same time, partners of the EC-funded project talked in front of international audiences and in the project reports about the success of RISCOM in the Czech Republic (e.g., Andersson, 2012a).

The course of events got more dramatic in mid-2012. At that time, as a result of bilateral negotiations between RAWRA and individual municipalities and with the support of approved financial compensations, it seemed that local governments at two candidate sites were going to sign the contracts for site investigations. In response to this, local opposition intensified and new referendums eventually refused the site investigations. This was a blow for the state administration, which was apparently hoping that the site investigations might finally become more widely accepted and that further steps toward the repository could be taken. At that moment, in fact, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the parent institution of RAWRA, lost patience. Without prior caution it changed the direction back toward an authoritative, expert-driven decision-making. It

openly dissociated itself from RAWRA's strategy focused on dialogue. It was decided to apply for the site investigations even without the consent of concerned municipalities, regardless of the key promise RAWRA repeatedly gave within the WG.[17]

The trust of municipalities and NGOs was deeply shaken by these events. They perceived the situation as a return to the years before the moratorium. The WG almost ceased working. While RAWRA declared its interest in continuation of the WG, at least formally, the others hesitatingly agreed with further work on the condition that the status of the WG would change into a more action-oriented body. In addition, a background material for the revision of the governmental "Strategy for nuclear waste management" asked for a deep transformation of the existing WG too. It suggested, for instance, that those who are not seriously interested in "constructive negotiations" about the repository should be excluded from the WG (NRI, 2013). In short, the WG was most probably either going to be fully transformed into something else or completely abandoned.[18] The IPPA project, presenting the WG as the RISCOM Reference Group, was to end in 2013. One of the last IPPA reports (elaborated by two Czech participants), in its Recommendation section, does not refer to RISCOM at all anymore (Vojtěchová and Steinerová, 2013). Experiments with dialogue among equals evaporated. 'Clarification of arguments' and 'mutual understanding', so emphasised by RISCOM, but followed inconsistently already before, were completely abandoned.

To sum up, it is clear that the trajectory that started under the auspices of EC and with RISCOM is over.[19] This trajectory initially raised high hopes, but ultimately made *all* the participants of the process frustrated. RAWRA, as a key local proponent of RISCOM-like dialogue, got almost extirpated.[20] Not only municipality representatives and activists, but also Ministry people and technical experts were increasingly dissatisfied with the situation.[21] Much of the frustration came from what seemed to be an ineffective dialogue leading to nowhere. And even the leader of the IPPA project and Swedish author of RISCOM suddenly started talking only with hesitation about how RISCOM was implemented in the Czech Republic (personal communication, 2013).

RISCOM as a widely applicable technology of participation was left, in this particular case, alone and questionable.

Translating the RISCOM model

How can we understand this RISCOM story? How can we interpret the attempt at transferring the model from one context to another as a complex movement of translation? A simple explanation of the failing dialogue described above might refer to different political cultures, legal frameworks and other context conditions. In Sweden, for example, the municipalities involved in the siting process have a relatively strong position compared to the municipalities in the Czech Republic. In the Czech Republic, moreover, there are many municipalities on each preselected site, which makes negotiations more difficult than in sparsely populated areas of Sweden. In general, it is tempting to assert that RISCOM failed because, being based on the highly advanced Swedish (or Western European) democracy, it simply did not fit well into the specific Czech setting, with all the legacies of communist rule and with the blindness of Czech authorities and policy makers toward the centrality of the public in the entire process (Dawson and Darst, 2006). Let us put, however, such explanations aside (which does not mean dismissing them!) and try to understand the situation even more subtly.

How the Czech siting process and RISCOM became attractive to each other

When the Czech governmental moratorium was coming to an end, it was clear that the siting process had to be restarted on new grounds. However, RAWRA did not quite know what to do. Although it already had the experience with public protests, which preceded the moratorium, it was still basically an engineering organization, full of technical specialists, without the experience of engaging in a public debate. In this situation, RISCOM came as a light at the end of a tunnel, showing a possible way to proceed out of the deadlocked situation. It provided an opportunity to start anew on a relatively widely accepted basis. In fact, RISCOM provided RAWRA with a new identity: with the help of ARGONA and related

efforts, RAWRA became the main guarantor of the newly adopted approach and the dialogue with municipalities became its main mission. At this point in time, geological projects of RAWRA were suspended (see RAWRA Annual Reports 2004-6 available at SURAO, undated), and "everyone [at RAWRA] became engaged in communication with the public" (research interview with a RAWRA employee, 2011).

This transformation of RAWRA was necessarily limited. The personnel remained basically the same and it lacked sensitivity toward democratization in technical innovation.[22] RISCOM, as a seemingly transferable ready-made procedure for how to facilitate public dialogue, therefore looked particularly attractive. By adopting the Swedish technology for public dialogue, RAWRA was able to replace the technocratic view that there are no reasons to involve the concerned municipalities with the conviction that achieving the consent of local people is something basically technical and manageable.

An important thing was that RISCOM came to the Czech Republic as 'the Swedish model'. Since the early stages of the Czech siting process, Sweden had often been referred to, implicitly and explicitly, as the role model in deep geological repository development.[23] In official presentations as well as in our interviews with Czech stakeholders it was implied that RISCOM was widely used in Sweden, and that it lead to successful siting of the repository. This was, let us remind, somewhat contradictory, first, to the original framing and practice of RISCOM events as experimental, and second, to the relatively marginal position that RISCOM had in Swedish radioactive waste management.

It was only perfect that RISCOM appeared as something *imported*, and not invented or designed by a direct participant in the deadlocked Czech situation. In the eyes of the public, RAWRA had been discredited by that time, and the concerned people did not trust the implementers. Anything 'made by RAWRA' would have seemed suspicious. Further, RISCOM was not just a product of a 'third party' (a well-tested product, it was believed), but it was introduced to the Czech situation *together* with a third party – i.e., international mediators, relatively detached from the ongoing conflict. This helped to neutralize the situation and get the involved parties to sit at one table again.

Not only the implementers regarded this Swedish import positively. Also the NGOs expressed a cautious optimism. Activists were unhappy with how the negotiations between RAWRA and the municipalities had been carried out, and they saw the introduction of RISCOM not only as "one of the first attempts at transparency", but also as an opportunity to show "how untransparent and wrong the way of doing the whole thing here" had been (research interview, 2013). Furthermore, the activists often refer to Sweden as an example of a desirable *voluntary* approach; the possibility of Swedish municipalities to decline the project throughout the entire siting process was appreciated and put in sharp contrast to the Czech reality.[24] RISCOM, as 'the Swedish approach' was therefore welcomed also by other stakeholders.

The Czech situation at the time of the moratorium was very attractive for the Swedish RISCOM implementer too – and for related reasons. The attractiveness (or "interessement", as Callon (1986) would put it according to his sociology of translation) was mutual. We mentioned above that the inventors and proponents of RISCOM had the ambition to systematically develop the model into a universally applicable procedure already in the early Swedish life of RISCOM. For them, European research and policy projects provided unique application opportunities. Post-communist members of the EU constitute an especially good market for such services. Public deliberation in complex socio-technical controversies represents a relatively new challenge for policy makers in these countries. The state administration is often unprepared for possible conflicts, lacking qualified personnel and resources. And if it eventually happens, like in our story, that public initiatives get furious and irritated in response to some careless technocratic decision-making, policy makers become eager to participate in public involvement projects. No wonder that such countries provide a rewarding terrain for foreign public deliberation professionals, a genuine laboratory for testing new democratic approaches.

Adopting the RISCOM principles and making them empty: From stretching to safe space

When talking with the Czech participants it was clear that all of them had heard about RISCOM, or at least about 'the Swedish approach'; but hardly anybody was able to explain what exactly RISCOM was and how it was supposed to work. RISCOM was therefore widely accepted in the new setting mainly as *a general appeal* toward fair dialogue, and not as a strict experimental or laboratory form of deliberation.

It was easy for the Czech stakeholders to adopt RISCOM in such a non-specific form, since everybody had been frustrated from the protracted non-communication and general distrust. The prospect of sitting around a table and just talking to each other, bounded by the rules of mutual respect and under the supervision of a relatively independent moderator, looked very refreshing and attractive (research interviews, 2011, 2013). Thus, the RISCOM framework became quickly accepted and shared by all the participants without contestation – but only at the cost of losing important specificities of the model.

But RISCOM was not only de-specified, it was also emptied. As noted above, activities within the newly established stakeholder groups quickly turned into a dialogue for dialogue. In the beginning of the ARGONA project the stated aim was "to increase common knowledge of *all aspects* related to siting geological disposal with the goal to increase transparency and engage public in the decision-making process" (Minutes of the first Reference Group meeting, 13 May 2008, available at SURAO (undated) – emphasis added). This never really happened though. Whereas in Sweden some RISCOM activities included discussions about, for example, alternative technical options (such as deep boreholes), the Czech debate within the WG focused mainly on the status of the group itself and, generally, on how to strengthen the legal position of municipalities in the siting process. Geological and engineering aspects were left out of the debate, while the only relevant issue became how to obtain agreement with the concerned municipalities. Indeed, "feelings of people" (NRI, 2013: 76), and not alternative technical solutions, became the primary

target during this dialogue-phase of the siting process.

The tendency toward emptying the dialogue (by means of making it acceptable and workable in the new setting) can be observed in a number of ways. Let us take, for example, the following shift. In official presentations, the authors of RISCOM used to emphasize 'stretching' as a crucial concept and activity within the RISCOM model (Andersson, 2011, 2012b). Stretching is explained to mean publicly "testing and challenging the claims put forward by the proponent and the relevant authorities" (Westerlind and Andersson, 2004: 1). However, in our data we have not found any signs of stretching being actually applied during the Czech RISCOM activities. This concept is neither mentioned in any of the materials produced by the WG, nor was any of the meetings we have visited or heard of organized around stretching practices. Stretching simply did not seem to play any important role in the Czech part of the project.[25]

While the importance of 'stretching' was diminishing during the introduction of RISCOM in the Czech Republic, another notion was gaining more and more significance: the notion of 'safe space' (for dialogue).[26] Safe space can be understood as a precondition for stretching; then it would be a space where participants do not feel threatened by possible conflicts and pressures to reach decisions so that stretching may become as challenging as possible. However, *without stretching*, safe space easily becomes *a space where nothing important happens* – a space serving those who actually do not want to engage in an effective, change-producing dialogue. And this was far away from what the Czech stakeholders (not only municipalities and NGOs, but also the Ministry) ultimately expected from the dialogue. As already mentioned, the participants, as soon as their pleasure from dialogue in general had gone away, became frustrated by the fact that negotiations within the WG had almost no real consequences and the RISCOM-like space of the WG was simply 'safe' mainly for RAWRA.

Therefore, we can see that a shift in emphasis from 'stretching', which remained an opaque expression for the Czech participants, to 'safe space' contributed to a rather legitimate feeling

that the dialogue did not have direct impact on the situation. Let us remember, nonetheless, what was discussed in one of the earlier sections: the RISCOM style of dialogue was by definition intended to be politically irrelevant, so to speak. At least in terms of immediate consequences. As a deliberately laboratory dialogue, temporarily established outside of real-life politics, *it is to be*, in the sense of practical politics, for 'nothing'. So where is the problem?

From a marginal, supplementary procedure, to the main vehicle of political deliberation

RISCOM's laboratory character was obvious and clearly articulated when RISCOM started its life in Sweden. Already the Swedish Dialogue project was explicitly organized as an experiment. It was organized as a role-play in which participants reviewed a fictitious application from the nuclear waste industry to build a repository at a hypothetical site. In the report the fictional character is emphasized in phrasings such as: "the transfer of the experiences from the project to a *real* review process will require a continued dialogue between the *real* actors" (SKI, 1993a: 12, emphasis added).

RISCOM organized within the ARGONA project in the Czech Republic resembled a 'lab participation' exercise in many respects (Bogner, 2012): it was led by participation professionals; the participants were made to sign formal agreements; it was organized in the context of a research project and funded by a third party; and it was well-documented and subject of further research. The aim of ARGONA was "to test and apply approaches to transparency and participation in decision-making process within the participating countries" (Vojtěchová, 2009: 3). All this was in line with previous RISCOM projects.

One important thing was different though, largely unnoticed.[27] Originally, in Sweden, RISCOM was one of many forms of public dialogue or participation. As such, it was rather complementary. As Elam et al. (2008) put it, RISCOM had the function of being repair work to SKB's failures – by opening up issues that threatened the legitimacy of the nuclear waste programme if they had continued being silenced and neglected

(Elam et al., 2008; see also Elam et al., 2010). Only under such conditions, the specific laboratory design of this procedure makes sense. Participation in RISCOM provides a unique experience, not available 'in the wild', namely that it pulls the stakeholders out of the political turmoil, putting them into artificial conditions of a fair and safe Habermasian dialogue. Such dialogue may enrich participants' perspectives, clarify their arguments and make them better prepared for practical political negotiations *after* the project is over. In order to work, therefore, the utopia of RISCOM has to be established *temporarily* and as a specific *complement* to real political negotiations. A dialogic exercise of this kind cannot *replace* actual negotiations and democratic decision-making. It makes sense only as an accompaniment of it, an extra with specific added value.[28]

In the Czech Republic, however, RISCOM became associated with *the* main and sometimes the only recognized form of actual public dialogue, the Working Group – a true showcase of the turn toward a more democratic approach. Put differently, the distinction between the inside and the outside of the RISCOM space, emphasised by RISCOM inventors as the effective force of its approach, was not maintained in the Czech setting. The Czech RISCOM, contrary to the situation in Sweden, had simply *no outside*. It became integral to the only recognized deliberative forum, the WG. RISCOM's possible specific import, as an experimental dialogue separated from real-life politics, could not be fulfilled.

In conclusion: Democratic participation in and out of the laboratory

Was RISCOM translated successfully? Talking about success and failure is always a delicate thing: success or failure for whom and within what time frame? Seen as a clearly demarcated model, as a stable, strictly defined and tightly controlled experimental object, RISCOM can never fail. Its failure can always be explained by the fact that the RISCOM model was not implemented properly and as strictly as possible (and thus failure must be ascribed to something else).[29] The actor-network logic of translation, however, imagines a different

RISCOM. While travelling from case to case, from one country to another, RISCOM was being transformed by contributions of *many hands*, more or less directly responsible for these movements.

Especially when located far away from the Swedish reality, e.g., in meeting rooms in Prague, RISCOM quite visibly ceased to be an exclusive creation of its original authors, and was redefined and reshaped by other actors too. Most of the Czech participants did not actually intend to import a specific and rather supplementary element of a broad range of public involvement techniques. Instead, some were interested in RISCOM simply as an embodiment of the 'successfully' accomplished process of siting in Sweden (not quite correctly); others saw it (quite misleadingly) as something associated with the spirit of voluntary approach, within which Swedish municipalities were treated with much more respect and care than was the case in the Czech Republic. Yet, it cannot be concluded that the Czech stakeholders simply misunderstood the essence of RISCOM, violated its key principles and, in fact, implemented – badly – something else. The very original Swedish authors of RISCOM were pretty close to the entire translation process, an important part of it, indeed. They actively pursued their own interests while translating RISCOM along this particular trajectory, using all the respective transmutations for their own purposes. These purposes had nothing to do with preserving RISCOM, at all costs, in its original contours, but rather with developing it into an internationally relevant tool that could be repeatedly applied and tested in different countries (see, e.g., the IPPA project and its key reports).

How to understand the story of RISCOM's translation then? Initially, the ARGONA project brought something really new and refreshing to the Czech situation. RISCOM offered an attractive political fiction, which seemed to bring a true and practical relief from serious personal and social tensions related to the deadlocked controversy and years-long moratorium. But this could not take long. Turned into a rather general appeal to fair dialogue and transparency, RISCOM soon became a rather empty deliberative exercise. This introduction of RISCOM into the Czech environment, under the direct supervision of its authors, deprived this peculiar lab-style dialogue from the only meaningful context it could have. Actors on both sides of the controversy got increasingly frustrated by what seemed just for show and without palpable results and at the same time the only platform for negotiations.

One should note that the Czech participants did not fully understand and appreciate the subtle potential impact of RISCOM, simply because they really could not do so – and the reason was not (just) that RISCOM was badly explained to them by its author, but rather that RISCOM had substantially changed: it had lost some of its specific contours and properties while relatively new emphases emerged. Originally, RISCOM was an avowedly laboratory experiment with quite limited, specific and subtle relevance in real-life politics. During the transport through two European projects to the postcommunist context it was translated into a universal technology that raised high expectations, which were necessarily betrayed later on. It came to be understood by the implementers as a major tool that would help them to obtain the consent of the concerned municipalities in a democratic way. It was, in fact, a matter of compromise *on both sides*: RISCOM was adopted in the Czech Republic only at the cost of becoming something else than originally intended in Sweden; RISCOM-related projects succeeded only due to betraying the strict version of RISCOM. This transformation of RISCOM was not an unanticipated side-effect of the travel but rather a key element of what made the transfer possible – only this new RISCOM could be interesting to the main Czech stakeholders, practically manageable and, in a specific way, successful. But, let us stress once more, it cannot be said that the Czech users simply mistook RISCOM for something else. Its key original author and designer did not leave RISCOM to its own destiny. He not only actively participated in the translation of the Swedish design of RISCOM into the Czech one, but was also dependent on the fact that these translations were (as successful interventions) part of the EC-funded implementation projects. It has been, after all, by means of these projects that RISCOM was actually becoming internationally applied "as a platform for decision making in [various] complex issues" (Karita Research, undated).

With all respect toward the complexity of the above described movement we may therefore talk about a failed translation, a treason. As Callon (1991: 145) explains: "A successful process of translation […] generates a shared space, equivalence and commensurability. It aligns. But an unsuccessful translation means that the players are no longer able to communicate. Through a process of alignment they reconfigure themselves in separate spaces with no common measure". And this is exactly what happened in our case. Not only the identity of RISCOM was loosened and challenged, so that one may doubt whether the model actually was not transformed into something else throughout the translation. The initial alignment of dialogue, so promising right after the end of moratorium, dissolved too: ultimately, RAWRA survived the collapse of dialogue only by another radical redefinition of itself; the Ministry 'forgot' its constitutive relationship to the WG, while the WG started eroding and renegotiating its status; RISCOM does not seem to have future in the Czech Republic – after all, the authors of RISCOM partly dissociated themselves from recent developments in this country. It is hard to tell, clearly and unambiguously, who was responsible for the betrayal. The translation definitely could have been done more faithfully, in collaboration with all participating actors, but probably – given their partial perspectives and the complexity of the situation – not *much* better.

Several elements in the story of RISCOM fit surprisingly well together, quite seductively: the EU's urge to strengthen democratic elements in socio-technical decision making; the ambition of a public deliberation professional to develop RISCOM into a universally applicable technology that can be transferred from case to case and from country to country; pressures to succeed in this kind of lab-participation projects;[30] the complicated situation of the Czech government which wanted to overcome the resistance of concerned municipalities as quickly as possible and yet in a democratic way; mayors from concerned municipalities and activists who desperately needed allies authoritative enough to push the Czech decision-makers to take their position seriously - these are just a few key circumstances of this complex case that have led to this *understandable*

misunderstanding and the resulting state of 'lost-in-translation'.

More generally, we can see the story of RISCOM and of implementation projects such as ARGONA and IPPA as an example of a rather strong tendency toward technologization and specialization of public involvement. This tendency is based on a recent relative success of pressures toward democratization of science and technology (Felt et al., 2007; Liberatore, 2001). While it is widely recognized that decision-making in complex socio-technical arenas should be open to concerned lay publics, the long-established power practices are extremely resilient and it is difficult to replace them with a less technocratic political culture. Many therefore feel tempted to spread democratic governance by means of controlled and almost scientific implementation of ready-made procedures, models or techniques, firmly in grasp of experienced professionals.

This temptation seems especially strong in cases where a kind of democratic or deliberative deficit is obvious. Here come genuine 'technologies of participation': models of participative procedures, carefully orchestrated from above for those who are invited; but also, even more importantly, models that are capable of travelling – i.e., that can be used, under specialized supervision, repeatedly and outside their original contexts. The technological nature of these political tools and their transferability go hand in hand, constituting each other. That is why we believe that paradoxes of invited participation, addressed by Bogner (2012) and many others, are particularly palpable in cases such as ours, when participative models are on the move. These are extreme and explicit examples of technologizing democracy that make it particularly visible how delicate and often ambiguous democratization of science and technology is. We are not critical of RISCOM or other participative procedures per se. Rather, we have used the story of RISCOM travelling from Sweden to the Czech Republic to shed some light on the practice that, while building upon reasonable assumptions, often encourages too high expectations from, and unreflective handling of such political technologies.

Bogner's (2012) analysis of 'lab participation' is of particular interest here. In his conclusions,

Bogner asserts that "[w]hile society at large is becoming a laboratory in which knowledge is produced," in the form of "real-life experiments", "public participation is retreating from society into the lab", taking place in seclusion and on a small scale (Bogner, 2012: 522). This is a relevant insight, indicating deeply paradoxical developments in contemporary societies. The story of RISCOM reminds us, however, that the tension between the artificial world of laboratory and real-world conditions keeps its importance. RISCOM probably does make sense as a laboratory experiment with certain impact in the real-world politics, at least in theory. Secluded laboratory setting still allows effects that cannot be achieved in the wild, out-there. Artificial conditions remain productive, even for experiments in participation, provided we understand (and preserve) the distinction between them and the real life. It was this distinction which was lost in translating RISCOM from Sweden to the Czech Republic.

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Notes

1   The acronym RISCOM stands for 'Risk Communication' (Andersson et al., 1998: ii).

2   International socio-technical challenges for implementing geological disposal, INSOTEC (2011-2014) was supported within the EC 7th framework program (FP7-Fission-2010, 269906). We thank all the participants for fruitful discussions that helped us to shape arguments presented in this paper. We also thank to two anonymous reviewers for careful reading of our paper and useful feedback.

3   "To say something is to say it in other words. In other words, it is to translate… If a message is transported, then it is transformed. We never get a message that is simply spread" (Latour, 1988: 181).

4   One might be surprised seeing such a normative expression in an ANT-inspired study. But let us not be mistaken. ANT – with all its emphasis on symmetry and relationality – has never tried to suggest that it does not really matter what scientists (and other people) do in their efforts to 'discover truths'. Failure and success (e.g., good or bad science) have never been abolished words in this intellectual tradition. In his recent attempt to correct misunderstandings about his approach, Latour (2013: 159) insists: "there is a huge difference between making something well and making it badly".

5   Blaming RISCOM itself for being an inappropriate, badly devised model for public involvement, deemed to fail from the very beginning, would only be a mirror argument, similarly flat.

6   Such as in the ironic suggestion of a pneumatic parliament by Sloterdijk and Haegen (2003), by means of which the political culture of the West could easily and quickly spread all over the planet.

7   See Callon et al. (2009). For a recent discussion of the participatory turn in the field of radioactive waste management, see Bergmans et al. (2014).

8   See also Chilvers (2008), Kothari (2005), Sundqvist and Elam (2010) or Soneryd (2015) for discussion of how public involvement is becoming increasingly technical or even technocratic.

9   These principles were in 2005 described as being (VALDOC group, undated): a multi-perspective starting point; stretching capacity; impartiality and fairness and publicity.

10 For instance, who hosts meetings, where they take place, who moderates sessions, who writes the final report, and so on (Andersson and Wene, 2006).

11 Currently, there are ten active nuclear reactors in Sweden, which accounts for 40-50% of national electricity production (Daoud and Elam, 2012).

12 In this respect, RISCOM was introduced to the Czech Republic in a situation similar to the one in Sweden in the 1980s, i.e., characterized by a technocratic approach and local protests. See Carter (1988) for how the Czechoslovak government was committed to the nuclear energy program even before 1989, under socialist era.

13 In contrast to Sweden, in the Czech Republic the state assumes the responsibility for radioactive waste management, and therefore the state (not a company) is the implementer of geological disposal. The state organization called Radioactive Waste Repository Authority (RAWRA) was established in 1997, as a governmental organisation subordinate to the Ministry of Industry and Trade. See SURAO (undated).

14 The web sites related to RISCOM, i.e. online presentations of the two EC projects ARGONA and IPPA, as well as of Karita, a Swedish consulting company, which coordinated these projects, recently ceased to be available on the Internet – probably due to death of the RISCOM's main author and proponent. Former and incomplete versions of these presentations, however, are available via Wayback Machine at https://web.archive.org/.

15 The IPPA project aimed to take the results and experiences of the ARGONA project further, by means of implementing RISCOM in several East European countries, and establishing 'safe spaces' for public discussion within their national programs (cf. Andersson et al., 2011; see also IPPA, undated). The WG was explicitly associated with the IPPA project and it was taken by the IPPA participants as a RISCOM Reference Group.

16 Following De Laet (2000) we could say that the object of RISCOM became somewhat destabilized by the travel.

17 More specifically, the Ministry of Industry and Trade gave mandate to a state-owned mining company GEAM to apply for the site investigations, leaving RAWRA completely out for the moment.

18 In the beginning of 2015, the WG was officially changed into a working group of the Governmental Council for energy and raw materials strategy of the Czech Republic. However, already during 2016, mayors and NGO representatives started leaving the group and today the WG is "no longer existing" (quoted from the leaflet published by RAWRA in July 2017). But that is already another story, not directly related to the RISCOM era.

19 Our strategy was modified, we have to be more effective, writes the Director of RAWRA in a letter from June 3, 2013 to mayors of concerned municipalities.

20 During 2012-2013 RAWRA was repeatedly criticised in governmental documents. It even appeared on a list of useless institutions proposed for cancellation by the Government (Desítky bizarních úřadů zmizí, ušetří se tak miliardy [Dozens of bizarre offices disappear, saving billions], *Hospodářské noviny/iHned*, 15. 2. 2013. Available at http://archiv.ihned.cz/c1-59325600-desitky-bizarnich-uradu-zmizi-usetri-se-tak-miliardy).

21 In its Annual Report for the year 2012, the State Office for Nuclear Safety writes: "The entire program [of siting the repository, for which RAWRA is fully responsible] is quite inefficient in parts that we feel competent to comment." The Deputy Director of a company newly responsible for site investigations (against the will of concerned municipalities) says at a public meeting in Věžná, January 9, 2013: "RAWRA has the budget of some 170 or 200 million per year, 47 employees, and it has been operating here for twenty years. And the results? Zero, zero. Nothing".

22 Above all, RAWRA people were – pretty much in line with so called 'deficit model' (Wynne 2007) – too often mistaking 'informing the public' for public dialogue and participation in decision making. This is clear for instance in RAWRA's annual reports 2008-2013, which describe the relationship between RAWRA and the concerned public in terms of "communication", "public relations", "providing regular information on our activities and objectives", and so on.

23 Images from the Äspö laboratory or of the Swedish copper containers have been routinely used by RAWRA, for instance on its website, to promote deep geological repository as a viable and socially acceptable solution. During the public debates in the Czech Republic, one could often hear from the proponents of geological repository that in Sweden, people actually *wanted* the repository, and the communities were even competing for it.

24 In reality, as indicated earlier, the voluntary approach of SKB had no relation to dialogic exercises of RISCOM.

25   A telling detail: The English programme for the "IPPA End Users Conference" held in Prague in September 2013 mentions a slot entitled "Stretching of IPPA results by the end users". This is a clear hint by the foreign organizers to the idea that stretching should apply to all the participants of RISCOM - not only to the implementer of the repository (Andersson, 2009: 44), but in this case also to the implementer of RISCOM. The Czech version of the programme, however, puts the title of this very section quite differently and misleadingly – it says "*spreading* the IPPA results by their end users" (in Czech: "Rozšiřování výsledků projektu IPPA jejich koncovými uživateli"). This indicates that the Czech participants simply did not understand (and did not care about) the original meaning of the word at all. For them, it was an unintelligible marginal notion.

26   It is worth to note that this shift, although originally related to the RISCOM activities in the Czech Republic, does not concern this specific context only. 'Safe space' gains importance more generally. While browsing related web pages and IPPA project reports, RISCOM sometimes seems to have become practically equivalent to the notion of safe space.

27   It was unnoticed not only by the Czech participants, but even (deliberately or not, hard to tell) by the Swedish partners, the authors of RISCOM.

28   As clarified by the author of RISCOM himself, in his comments on an earlier output from the InSOTEC project: "[we] always emphasized that the model and the RISCOM process is for the clarification of stakeholder arguments for the sake of quality decision making and *not* for any purpose of consensus building leading to acceptance."

29   For an account of similar logic in explaining the success or failure in scientific experiments, see Collins (1985).

30   It has been argued that policy-related projects, even when framed by academic or research perspectives, tend to prefer success stories to failure stories to prove their relevance and meaningfulness (Epstein, 1990). Chilvers (2008: 3003) reminds that participatory practices nowadays have become a "vibrant and diverse industry" characteristic by rivalry between participatory experts engaged in intensive marketing of their own policy tools.