

REGULAR SESSION INFORMATION

Title of Session: Sociological Theory and Research after 3.11,2011, Fukushima

Name of Session Convener(s): *Shoji Ishitsuka*, Tokyo University of Information Sciences

Chair: *Shoji Ishitsuka*, Tokyo University of Information Sciences

Comments: -

I) Sociological Theory and Research after 3.11. 2011, Fukushima

Shoji Ishitsuka, Tokyo University of Information Sciences

II) Learning from Mega Disasters: Tokyo after Fukushima 2011

Anni Greve, Roskilde University

III) Nuclear Power in Portugal and Civic Epistemologies: Past and Present

Paulo de Freitas Castro Fonseca, University of Coimbra

Tiago Santos Pereira, University of Coimbra

Session description:

In my evaluation, *Fukushima 11. 3. 2011* has challenged us sociologists in a fundamental way : firstly it is evident that a huge earthquake in a thousand years has posed *a basic question of the relation of nature and human civilization* in general, for we, modern civilized people have never experienced this kind of shock ; secondly this kind of natural impact necessarily triggered a political and social problem around the nuclear power in general ; thirdly *Fukushima* as the third huge menace to society as a whole, after the Three Mile Island and the Chernobyl accidents has brought quite a natural reaction all over the world starting with Germany, Italy and France, of the diminution of nuclear energy.

I think it is the duty of us, Japanese sociologists, to tackle this theme in the deepest way with the widest range of vision, for we Japanese have experienced unfortunately not only *Fukushima* but also *Hiroshima and Nagasaki*.

This is the necessity and the reason that I organize this session set up well for the coming generation of sociologists.

Abstracts:

I) *Sociological Theory and Research after 3.11. 2011, Fukushima*

Shoji Ishitsuka, Tokyo University of Information Sciences

The organizer's short talk about the very agenda of this session, referring to some challenging items after 3.11. 2011, Fukushima : firstly this event brings about us a reconsideration of modern civilization in general, so I will develop the thesis of the alienation of civilization, the contemporary *problematique* of the relation between man and nature, secondly I will talk about different reactions around 3.11, Fukushima in Japan and abroad, in the world. Thirdly I will deal with the relation between the 3.11. 2011, Fukushima event and sociological theory & research.

II) *Learning from Mega Disasters: Tokyo after Fukushima 2011*

Anni Greve, Roskilde University

In Tokyo building on ruins has been its sine qua non ever since the city turned into an enormous urban formation in the seventeenth century: 'The trauma of urban collapse has been so severe for us in Japan, the inevitability of destruction and rebirth' (Arate Isozaki 2006¹). But March 2011 *the earthquake was 45 times as great as the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake in the Tokyo area, which killed approximately 140.000 people*. Even though Japan is considered one of the best-prepared countries in the world for handling major disasters the reality of a large nuclear disaster proved to be far worse than what was planned for. This paper presentation discusses "The Great East Japan Earthquake" of

2011 with particular focus on what happens to social relations and cultural norms, when uncertainty and crisis is something people are living through and living in. 1 Isozaki, A. (2006), *Japan-ness in Architecture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts : the MIT press).

III) Nuclear Power in Portugal and Civic Epistemologies: Past and Present

Paulo de Freitas Castro Fonseca, University of Coimbra

Tiago Santos Pereira, University of Coimbra

One of Fukushima's noted international dimensions has been its overwhelming influence on public attitudes towards nuclear energy technologies. Also in Portugal, when the nuclear was reemerging as a possible alternative to face climate change issues, the Japanese tragedy has definitively sank the weak public confidence that was left and highlighted the crucial role of public understandings on governmental technoscientific decisions. There are many approaches to inquiry about the way publics understand, respect or contest these decisions, which are necessarily made according to local and historical socio-economic concerns, and the corresponding political culture. One of these prominent views is provided through the concept of civic epistemologies (Jasanoff, 2005)¹. In this regard, this study proposes to characterise Portuguese civic epistemology, by exploring debates surrounding the project of the construction of a nuclear power plant in Portugal. Reaching two historical periods: the initial impetus in the 1970s, through public initiative, and its re-emergence in media and political debates in the late 2000s. In both cases the contrary opinions from the public held back government's support to nuclear enthusiasts, but with distinct forms of public reasoning. The first period develops in the wake of a panoply of social and political movements that followed the 1974's *coup d'état*, among which emerged protests from the local population in Ferrel against the construction of a nuclear power plant. In a climate of intense citizen participation in all sorts of decision-making, the protests also triggered the emergence of an organized and motivated expert community that was able, not only to gain access to the media, but to exchange views with the local population, and not just stand in the technical committees that discussed its possible implementation. In the resulting dynamics, technical and political decision makers had to consider the local concerns about safety and environmental impact, and listen and consider different technical and economic arguments and statements that ended up justifying "rational" moratoria of the nuclear plans.

The nuclear debate reemerged in the late 2000s, now promoted by the private sector and facing a different climate of participation, as well as of technological belief. At this time, while the Government remained silent, scientists were more vocal in supporting the nuclear project than in developing dialogue with the citizens to understand public concerns. Nevertheless, amid a starting climate of recession and a later turn of events fuelled by the Fukushima accident, the project did not set off and it eventually died out of the media.

A comparison between both controversies suggest that while the revolutionary period developed a truly civic epistemology, its characteristics were not more than temporary, and were progressively adapted through the rule of the technocracy. Recent events in Fukushima may have a similar temporary impact unless a more substantial change in civic epistemologies is implemented, in areas where the technical tends to dominate.