

LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS: ACHIEVING STAKEHOLDER CONSENSUS ON LOW-LEVEL WASTE DISPOSAL?

Evelyn Hoofft, Communications Department, ONDRAF/NIRAS
Anne Bergmans, Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Antwerp,
Katleen Derveaux, Project Coordinator, STOLA, Local Partnership of the Municipality of Dessel,
Liesbet Vanhoof, Project Coordinator, MONA, Local Partnership of the Municipality of Mol

ABSTRACT

Nuclear waste management is more than finding a technical answer to a technical problem. Dealing with nuclear, or any other form of hazardous waste, for that matter, not only implies solving a technical problem, it also means solving a societal problem. And societal questions cannot be resolved in a technical laboratory. Of course, the technical aspect of nuclear waste management and disposal is a very important one, but the societal aspect is of equal importance. In order to find an implementable solution to deal with nuclear waste, attention should be paid to what kind of solution the society wants and under what conditions a proposed solution might be acceptable. This, however, cannot be achieved by simply adding a number of "societal parameters" to a technical concept modeling. It is something that can only be established through interaction with the public concerned. And that, in addition, is not something that can be preformed as an accidental spin off of a vastly elaborated technical program. Communicating or interacting with the public does not mean sweeping them off their feet with smoothly edited leaflets explaining how technically sound the proposed solution is and how wonderful it would fit in their back yard. Adding, just to prove how brilliantly this all has been thought through, numerous safety measures, so people would feel reassured. This kind of communication, will only activate people's suspicion and drive them straight into a "NIMBY"-reaction. The public (and by this we mean the stakeholders or the people actually concerned) should be involved in the decision making on nuclear waste from the very start of the program. This means that they must be aware of the fact that tests are taken place, that they can participate in the follow up of these technical analysis, and, that they have a say in whether further steps will eventually be taken.

INTRODUCTION

In Belgium, the management of radioactive waste is ensured by ONDRAF/NIRAS, the Belgian Agency for Radioactive Waste and Enriched Fissile Materials. ONDRAF/NIRAS is a public institution, responsible since 1980 for the safe management of all radioactive waste produced in Belgium, including the management of excess enriched fissile materials and the decommissioning of closed down nuclear facilities. Under the supervision of the competent authorities, it co-ordinates and manages various industrial and research activities that are carried out by third parties and aim to protect the present and future generations from the potential dangers of radioactive waste.

ONDRAF/NIRAS started working on the long-term management of short-lived low-level radioactive waste shortly after its creation. Practised on a regular basis in Belgium until the early eighties, sea disposal of conditioned low-level waste had indeed become very uncertain in 1984, when Belgium decided to adhere to the international moratorium of 1983 between the signatory countries of the London Convention on sea pollution.

This decision prompted ONDRAF/NIRAS to launch studies to look for another solution, which would be safe and technically acceptable, for the final disposal of this type of waste on Belgian territory. These studies, which are still going on, have gone through various phases. The sometimes harsh reactions in public opinion and the recommendations of independent experts, however, progressively led ONDRAF/NIRAS to question its work methodology.

TWENTY YEARS OF LOW-LEVEL RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT IN BELGIUM

One of the first actions ONDRAF/NIRAS undertook, after sea disposal had been interrupted, was the development and implementation of a methodology for waste processing and conditioning, to ensure the stabilization of short-lived low-level waste. At the same time, the agency began with the construction of interim storage buildings. All these activities are concentrated on the site of Belgoprocess, the industrial subsidiary of ONDRAF/NIRAS, located in Mol-Dessel. Once the short-term management of the waste had been ensured for several decades, ONDRAF/NIRAS was able to concentrate on the development of solutions for the long-term management of this waste.

ONDRAF/NIRAS's first study on the final disposal of short-lived low-level radioactive waste considered three options: disposal in old charcoal mines or quarries, shallow-land burial, and deep geological disposal. The corresponding final report, the NIROND 90-01 report, published in 1990, concluded that shallow-land burial was the most promising of the three proposed options in terms of technical feasibility, safety, and cost. It rejected the mines or quarries option, which was in fact no more than a type of deep disposal, because of a risk of aquifer contamination. It furthermore mentioned that the studies on Boom Clay carried out in Mol, had demonstrated the need for additional research on the chemical compatibility of the waste with the deep underground. ONDRAF/NIRAS therefore decided, after approval by its regulatory authority, to focus its efforts from then on on surface disposal.

The studies carried out between 1990 and 1993 aimed to assess the technical feasibility of building a surface repository on various types of geological formations. The results were recorded in the NIROND 94-04 report, published in 1994. This report concluded the feasibility of disposing at the surface level of at least 60% of the short-lived low-level radioactive waste produced in Belgium, while strictly following the recommendations of the various relevant international organizations. It also identified 98 zones on Belgian territory as potentially suitable, according to the bibliographical survey carried out, for hosting a surface repository for short-lived low-level radioactive waste. The multi-disciplinary scientific advisory committee set up by ONDRAF/NIRAS's Board of Directors to examine the report issued a globally positive evaluation, but recommended extending the research to fields related to economics and human sciences.

Far from going unnoticed, the 1994 report was rejected unanimously by all the local councils on the list. To its surprise, ONDRAF/NIRAS had caused a general outcry. And yet, had it not been given the responsibility to develop and propose, through an objective and rational approach, a safe solution to the problem of radioactive waste? Neither the political authorities nor ONDRAF/NIRAS had realized in due time what the implications were in the field of public consensus when it turned out to be necessary to look for a favorable geology outside the existing nuclear sites. As a result, the publication of the NIROND 94-04 report in April 1994 led to a public deadlock.

WHEN TECHNIQUE IS CONFRONTED WITH LOCAL SENSITIVITIES

The working method that ONDRAF/NIRAS applied in the past, aimed to select the future disposal site for short-lived low-level waste on the basis of a scientific approach that had been carefully worked out by its experts. At that time, ONDRAF/NIRAS thought – maybe rather naively – that the actual implantation of a repository would cause no problems once it had been proven that the chosen site was, from a technical point of view, one of the best possible choices. ONDRAF/NIRAS looked for a solution for the radioactive waste problem in an objective and rational manner. Gradually, ONDRAF/NIRAS realized that important parameters were missing in its mathematical model. The implantation of a disposal infrastructure would inevitably have economic, social and ecological consequences. Also, the public's reactions were confirming the validity of the committee's recommendations regarding the necessity to take into account the socio-economic aspects of the implantation of a final repository on the national territory. So ONDRAF/NIRAS progressively started to develop an adequate methodology to select, according to objective criteria, the best surface disposal sites among the 98 already identified zones. In addition the expected geological, hydrogeological, and radiological aspects, this methodology

included environmental and socio-economic factors. Unfortunately, these last parameters were impossible to model in a satisfactory way.

In 1995, in an attempt to break the stalemate, the government commissioned a study by ONDRAF/NIRAS on the possible alternatives to surface disposal. The final report, the NIROND 97-04 report, published in 1997, compared surface disposal with deep disposal and prolonged interim storage. It recommended that the government should base its decision on ethical considerations. Indeed, ONDRAF/NIRAS supports the view that the current generations are responsible for ensuring that future generations will not have to actively take care of the management of the radioactive waste they will have inherited.

On the basis of this report the Belgian federal government opted, on January 16th 1998, for a final or potentially final solution for the long-term management of short-lived low-level radioactive waste. The government also wanted this solution to be implemented in a progressive, flexible, and reversible manner. With this decision, the prolonged interim storage option was abandoned in favor of either surface disposal or deep geological disposal.

At the same time, the government entrusted new missions to ONDRAF/NIRAS, to allow the government to make the necessary technical and economic choice between surface disposal and deep geological disposal. According to these new missions, ONDRAF/NIRAS has to develop methods, including management and dialogue structures, necessary to integrate a repository project at the local level. Furthermore, ONDRAF/NIRAS has to limit its investigations to the four already existing nuclear zones in Belgium, namely Doel, Fleurus, Mol-Dessel, and Tihange, and to the local towns or villages that are interested in preliminary field studies.

INTRODUCING THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN NUCLEAR WASTE MANAGEMENT

Early 1998, ONDRAF/NIRAS set up a new work program on the basis of a new work methodology. The idea of local partnerships was developed to assure that every party that could be directly affected by a collective decision has an opportunity to express its opinions. The local partnerships project is an attempt to address the low-level waste disposal siting problem through both technical research and concept development, and interaction with the (local) stakeholders. The partnership concept was developed by researchers from the Department of Social and Political Sciences (PSW) of the university of Antwerp (UIA) and the research group SEED (Socio-Economic Environment Development) of the university of Luxemburg (FUL), on the basis of intense dialogue with ONDRAF/NIRAS. The concept was then discussed with different local stakeholders and, on their recommendations, adapted to meet local needs.

The idea behind the partnership concept stems from the presumption that collective decision making in a democratic environment is always a process of negotiation. Different interests, opinions and values are thereby weight one against the other. This weighing of interests is something that should be done **by** the stakeholders and **not for** them. Through participation and dialogue, people establish common ground and enter into coalitions to pursue a common goal. What is in the common interest of a particular group of people at a particular moment in time, is neither an abstract notion that transcends all particular interest, nor is it the mere sum of all these particular interests. It is in fact the outcome of a negotiation process through which different stakeholders try to further their interests and establish common ground. The mere technical aspects of the building and safeguarding of a low level radioactive waste repository, are but one element in the negotiations that inevitably proceed the decision making. Other elements such as the socio-economic context of the community concerned, the values, interests and, why not, emotions of different stakeholders, all play their part in the decision making process. Particular or personal interests should not be disregarded as selfish interests, but should be seen as pieces of a puzzle that shape an entirely different reality once they have been put together. One individual piece might look a bit “funny” (strange in shape, too bright in colour compared to the others, etc.), but once you link it to a few others, it starts to make sense and probably looks less trivial.

Bringing all the pieces of the puzzle together, is exactly what a local partnership intends to do.

THE LOCAL PARTNERSHIP ID-CARD

Focus on transparency and public involvement

The partnerships are intended to bring the decision making process closer to the public and to lower the threshold for active participation. Key words in the partnership approach are therefore transparency and public involvement. As explained before, public involvement is considered crucial in reaching an acceptable solution to the nuclear waste problem. This means that as many stakeholders, with as many different backgrounds and opinions as possible, should be invited to participate in the partnership. Local partners should therefore represent different political, economic, social, cultural and environmental movements or organizations within the community.

The partnership, however, should not become just another select club of decision makers. One of its primary tasks, therefore, is to be open and transparent, to make itself known to the rest of the public and to communicate (preferably in a highly interactive manner) what position it is taking.

Participation through representation

Discussing in depth the pro's and con's of a low-level nuclear waste repository in the surroundings, is not something that can practically be done through public hearings with several hundred people attending. A local partnership should therefore be considered as a representative democracy on a micro level. Over viewing the whole "operation", a *general assembly*, uniting representatives of all participating organizations, decides on the main course and sets out the beacons for the actual discussions. The general assembly appoints an *executive committee*, in charge of the day to day management of the organization. The committee is, amongst many other things, responsible for the co-ordination of working group activities, decision making on budget spending and the supervision of the project co-ordinators. In several *working groups* all different aspects of the implantation of a low level waste repository in the community are being discussed. Here all relevant existing research is taken into consideration, the need for additional studies is evaluated and independent experts are invited to participate in the debate. The working groups report regularly to the executive committee. The working groups are composed of both representatives of the organizations that founded the partnership, as well as individual citizens who expressed an interest to participate actively in this discussion forum. Since all these people participate on a voluntary basis, at least two full time *project co-ordinators* need to be employed by the partnership. These project co-ordinators take care of administrative and communication tasks and support the working groups both logistically and scientifically.

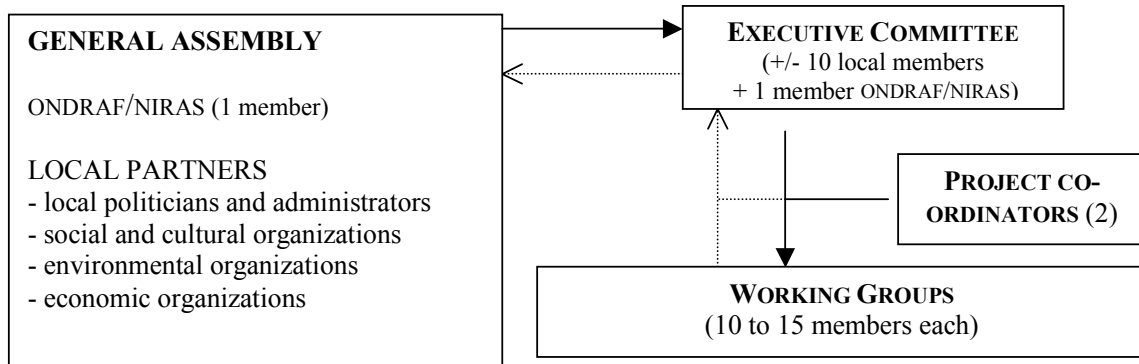


Fig. 1. Organizational structure of a local partnership

Located “on site”

The question whether a partnership had to be established on a regional or on a strictly local level was subject of much debate. In order to make the threshold for participation as low as possible, a local partnership, in its strictest sense, was recommended by the university researchers and agreed upon by ONDRAF/NIRAS and a majority of the local stakeholders. Regional authorities and administrations (as well as those representing other political decision levels) were not excluded from the concept proposition, but their role was limited to an advisory one. In this way, interests that go beyond the municipal boundaries can be expressed, without having a dominant or decisive influence on local decision making.

It was also considered important that the partnership should have its seat at the heart of the community concerned. A partnership, therefore, is not a field office from ONDRAF/NIRAS, but an independent local organization in which ONDRAF/NIRAS participates as the only non-local partner amongst a multitude of local stakeholders. This location “on site” gives the partnership a “face”. A clearly visible presence in the community creates awareness amongst the not participating citizens and the premises of the partnership can serve as an open platform where citizens can come with their questions, remarks or concerns. On a practical level, it also facilitates the meeting of local participants in the discussions, for the simple reason that they do not have to travel too far.

Arena and facilitator for open dialogue

A local partnership is both the arena and the facilitator for an open dialogue between all stakeholders on the possible siting of a low-level radioactive waste repository in a well defined community. This implies that the partnership is an active organization, imbedded and clearly visible in the local community, properly equipped to serve as a platform for the interaction between ONDRAF/NIRAS and the local stakeholders. The necessary infrastructure for the project co-ordinators to work in and the working groups and other bodies to assemble, should be available at the seat of the organization.

Through dialogue, all interested parties are invited to express their interests, concerns, fears and values, to listen to the views of other parties and to come to terms on what this particular group of citizens, in this particular community, at this particular point in time defines as a common goal. In this way, ONDRAF/NIRAS, in its role of project developer, enters into direct dialogue with the local community, interested in hosting the project. Experts from ONDRAF/NIRAS are given a forum to explain what, in their view, a low-level radioactive waste repository should look like and why they consider that to be a safe and healthy solution given the characteristics of the site in question. The members of the working groups can then question the ONDRAF/NIRAS experts directly and/or invite other experts, whose opinion they consider relevant. By entering into dialogue with the local community, the concept-designers have an opportunity to better explain their project to the local

stakeholders. Questions and reactions from the public, however, may require them to be more creative and to rethink certain aspects of their initial concept or project.

Independence in decision making and budget spending

Until the partnership has made its final proposal to the municipal council on whether, and under which conditions, a repository facility in the community would be acceptable, the partnership is the only body where decisions with regard to the potential repository are taken. There will thus be no question of parallel negotiations on other (for instance purely political, or more regional) levels. Since ONDRAF/NIRAS has only one member in both the general assembly and the executive committee (albeit with a veto on technical feasibility), it is the local community itself that decides on both technical and social feasibility.

In order to allow the partnership to work independently, each partnership receives an annual budget from ONDRAF/NIRAS. This budget is managed by the executive committee. It serves to cover general expenses such as the salaries of the project co-ordinators and all "operational costs" (stationary, telephone bills, mailing, electricity, ...), as well as logistical support for the working groups. This "logistical support" should be interpreted in the broadest possible way. Apart from serving the volunteers coffee and biscuits during their working group meetings, it also allows them to invite the experts of their choice, to order the studies they think necessary and to pay for site visits or other relevant trips or conferences.

The fact that the partnership budget can be used to order research or studies does not mean that all research activity is paid for by the partnership. ONDRAF/NIRAS pays for all necessary research with regard to the technical and safety aspects of the repository facility. The partnership, however, can decide that they are in need of some additional research in certain areas or that they do not entirely trust the ONDRAF/NIRAS results and want a second opinion. All non-repository related research is paid for by the partnership.

Mutual project development

Maybe the most important and probably the most innovative aspect of the partnership approach, is that the partnership does not only decide (or at least advises to the community council) on the repository concept and where it should (or should not) be implanted. Through the partnership, the local community can decide on what they consider to be the necessary conditions (technically, environmentally, aesthetically, etc.) for such a repository. Furthermore, within the partnership, an accompanying local project that seeks to bring added value to the community will be developed. The final outcome of the discussions in the partnership should therefore be either a "thanks, but no thanks" (i.e. based on all the information gathered, the community decides against the repository project for technical, safety or other reasons) or a mutual project, carried by both local stakeholders and ONDRAF/NIRAS.

And so we return to our puzzle. Both the repository project and the accompanying local project are developed and discussed in depth within the partnership. All pieces of the puzzle (individual remarks, concerns and ideas -from brilliantly innovative to absurd and not to the point-; expert reports and interventions; interests of stakeholders; etc.) are brought together. When finally, all, or at least a majority of the parties involved come to an agreement on what their puzzle, their global project, should look like, this is presented to the municipal council. In the end, it is the council that will, with or without an additional public consultation round¹, decide whether or not to put the municipality forward as a potential host for a low-level nuclear waste repository facility. Since the final word in this matter lays with the municipal council, it is also essential that council members are fully aware of the implications of their decision. To avoid the risk of conflicting interests between local politicians and the other members of the community, an active involvement of the representatives of the political arena is hence encouraged.

TWO ACTUAL LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS: (HOW) DO THEY WORK?

To succeed in its new working program, ONDRAF/NIRAS counted on the voluntary participation of the local communities, which was not an easy target. Three years after ONDRAF/NIRAS went public with its new approach, four municipalities have shown an active interest: the municipalities of Mol and Dessel, on whose territory several nuclear facilities are located, and the municipalities of Fleurus and Farciennes, on whose territory the nuclear facility of IRE, specialized in the production of radio-isotopes, is located. In Fleurus and Farciennes, a kind of informal structure was created in which representatives of all interested local actors can participate in the ongoing research program. Once the feasibility of disposal has been demonstrated, both municipalities will have to decide whether they wish to establish a local partnership with ONDRAF/NIRAS, with the mandate to work out plans for a local integrated disposal project. In the neighboring municipalities of Mol and Dessel, the dialogue with ONDRAF/NIRAS was formalized by founding a local partnership.

In Dessel the local partnership, STOLA-Dessel, was founded in September 1999. In Mol, MONA was born in February 2000. In both cases the social actors in the general assembly mainly are representatives of “advisory councils.” In Belgium advisory councils are organized on the level of municipalities to group different local organizations, involved in a certain policy area, such as youth, environment, culture, sports, etc. Next to these umbrella councils, a small number of individual social organizations are represented. A special place is reserved for local environmental organizations or advisory councils. The political delegates represent either the local council (council members) or the political parties that compose the local council.

The founding of both partnerships was preceded by a thorough social “site investigation”. A researcher from the university of Antwerp worked her way through the municipality, in search for potential partners and local input on the final partnership concept. In all, over 200 people were contacted, which contributed to a better understanding of the social structure of both municipalities and of the respective expectations and needs with regard to the partnership. Every possible local organization that expressed an active interest was encouraged to participate, either directly as a partner, or through the above mentioned advisory councils. No local organizations or individuals were prevented from participating.

The four working groups play a key role in the project. There are three technical and one social working group. The working group “implantation and design” focuses on the design of the concept of the repository, as well as on the implantation of the repository in the local environment (location,...). The working group “environment and health” explores the possible consequences of a repository for the environment and the health of the local people. The working group “safety” studies aspects of safety and emergency measures. These three working groups determine the conditions the repository has to comply with. Finally, the working group “local development” concentrates on the socio-economical added value of the possible repository for the community.

The working groups consist of the organizations represented in the general assembly, as well as individual inhabitants that take a personal interest in the matter. The only working group members that do not have to have a connection to the municipality, are the experts of ONDRAF/NIRAS and of the University of Antwerp. They only have an advisory role.

(For an overview, see the added ID-cards of STOLA-Dessel and MONA-Mol.)

EACH PARTNERSHIP IS DIFFERENT

Both municipalities situated



Mol and Dessel are located in the eastern part of the Antwerp province, about 60 km east of the city of Antwerp. Mol measures about 11.418 ha and has some 31.000 inhabitants, corresponding to an average population density of 276 inhabitants per square kilometer.

Dessel measures about 2.703 ha and has around 8.500 inhabitants, corresponding to an average population density of 314 inhabitants per square kilometer.

Since the fifties, several nuclear (waste) facilities are active in the region: SCK•CEN, Belgoprocess, Belgonucleaire, FBFC-international, IRMM, Transnubel and Tecnubel.

Fig. 2. Map

Local particularities

The size of the municipality is reflected in the size of the local partnerships: STOLA-Dessel has 29 members in the general assembly and 9 in the executive committee, whereas in MONA-Mol there are 36 members in the general assembly and 12 in the executive committee. In larger groups it can sometimes be more time-consuming to come to a decision. On working group level, both partnerships have about 60 members in their four working groups. For practical reasons, the maximum size of each working group was restricted to 15 to 20 members. No partnership had to refuse candidate members.

Even though the two local partnerships in Belgium are located in neighboring municipalities, both with nuclear facilities on their territory, each municipality has its own characteristics. Some of the differences have to do with the difference in size. Another difference is that environmental organizations are more active in Mol. In Dessel, however, the members seem to be less critical towards the disposal of low-level waste so far. This might change as the project will become more explicit. Finally, it is interesting to note that certain organizations that are active in both municipalities explicitly want to participate in STOLA-Dessel but not in MONA-Mol, or the other way around.

SOME LESSONS DRAWN FROM EXPERIENCE

Motivated volunteers

The partnership is based on a group of volunteers, who do not receive any remuneration for their attendance in the monthly meetings. Experience learns that the local stakeholders are nevertheless prepared to put in a big effort. The enthusiasm with which the inhabitants of Mol and Dessel participate in the project is encouraging. The members are driven by a real concern for the well-being of their own community and are thus motivated to give a well-founded advice to the local council.

The level of discussion

In the composition of the working groups it is important not to have too big a disproportion between the number of nuclear specialists (local people employed at the local nuclear companies) and lay people with an interest in the matter or in the well-being of the community. A disproportionate composition could cause the experts to increase the scientific level of their arguments, which could lead to discussions that are difficult for some people without a solid background in nuclear sciences. This, in turn, could restrain those members to take initiatives or cause them to drop out of the discussion.

Is independence possible?

Specialists are invited by the working groups to provide general information on the relevant topics. To increase the level of credibility, the working groups sometimes prefer to hear other opinions than those given by the ONDRAF/NIRAS experts. Most nuclear experts, however, are somehow related to nuclear organizations. As a result, they are not always considered as being objective. Independent and competent sources are then difficult to find. In Dessel, a university professor in geology was hired to give a critical view on the concept of disposal on the surface as presented by ONDRAF/NIRAS and to give technical guidance for a period of six months. From the ONDRAF/NIRAS experts, the working group members expect that they provide complete information and indicate where more research is required.

The difficult task of involving the municipality

Communicating with the public is not an easy task. Since only little feedback is given by the inhabitants, the partnership may not be able to identify all community concerns with respect to a possible repository of low-level waste. Both partnerships take nonetheless different initiatives to become more widely known in the municipality and to improve the involvement of the local population. First, every four months a newsletter is distributed to the inhabitants of the municipality, and among the local councils of the neighboring towns, the nuclear companies and the members of the local press. In this newsletter information is given on the purpose and the current status of the partnerships. Both local partnerships also have a website (www.stola.be / www.monavzw.be). Here visitors can find information on the purpose, the structure and the activities of the partnership, as well as general information on the municipality and radioactive waste. There is also a possibility to check what books are available in the library and to comment. In addition, the offices are open to the public at regular hours. It is fair to say that so far there have not been many visitors, except for interested students searching information for school assignments.

Because of the little feedback - little response and few visitors – it is important to keep looking for more effective ways to involve the broader population of the municipality. The partnerships try to find initiatives that lower the threshold for the inhabitants. STOLA-Dessel, for example, remained open for the public during the weekend of the annual fair in the municipality and organized several events (e.g. a drawing- and writing contest among the five local primary schools). MONA-Mol, on the other hand, is present at local events and informs interested local organizations on its activities. The partnerships will continue their efforts to inform and listen to the public.

Current conclusions

Preliminary inquiries and the creation of a social map of the community are necessary before actual steps can be taken. The selection of the members of the executive committee and the chairmen of the working groups, for example, have proven to be essential for the smooth working of the organization.

Involving a lot of people in a decision making process should lead to a more open, democratic and therefore more acceptable solution, but it also means that the decision making process takes a lot of time. The two years initially estimated, turned out to be insufficient to complete the study and the consultation. To be able to report on the whole of the matter of feasibility and acceptability of a low-level waste repository, the partnerships will extend their existence for two more years: one extra year for the working groups to come to their conclusions and a second year for the project coordinators to write the report in which the local partnership will give its well-founded advice to the municipal council.

Currently, it is too early to evaluate the whole of the process. Both partnerships are still investigating all possible options, so final decisions have not been made. Nevertheless, the partnership approach indicates to be a promising one. In the technical working groups, plenty of information was gathered and discussed. Concerning both the concept and the location of the repository facility, several options

were considered and preferences expressed. In the fourth working group, different options for the repository facility to bring added value to the community are being discussed. Over the next months, the pro's and con's of possible projects will be weighed one against the other and a suggestion will be put before the general assembly.

What the final outcome of this exercise will be, is still hard to predict. At present, we can only say that both partnerships are running rather smoothly, that they both have survived local elections and that up till now, only a very small number of people have backed out of the discussions.

FOOTNOTES

¹ In Belgium, the municipal council has the authority to organize local referenda on matters within its field of competence.

STOLA-DESSEL ID-CARD

ONDRAF/NIRAS ONDRAF/NIRAS MUNICIPALITY DESSEL

size 2.703 ha
 population 8.500 inhabitants
 population density 314 inhabitants per square kilometer

PARTNERSHIP STOLA-DESSEL

date of foundation 30/09/1999

	members	of which political actors	of which social actors	of which economical actors	of which ONDRAF/NIRAS
general assembly	29	11	9	8	1
executive committee	9	3	3	2	1

working groups	members	members of an organization	individual inhabitants	experts (ONDRAF/NIRAS, university)	number of meetings	average attendance rate
implantation & design	14	7	6	1	16	73 %
environment & health	13	9	3	1	8	63 %
safety	18	6	11	1	9	56 %
local development	15	11	2	2	17	68 %
<i>TOTAL</i>	60	33	22	5	13	65 %

MONA-MOL ID-CARD

MUNICIPALITY MOL

size 11.418 ha
 population 31.000 inhabitants
 population density 276 inhabitants per square kilometer

PARTNERSHIP MONA-MOL

date of foundation 09/02/2000

	members	of which political actors	of which social actors	of which economical actors	of which ONDRAF/NIRAS
general assembly	36	15	12	8	1
executive committee	12	4	4	3	1

working groups	members	members of an organization	individual inhabitants	experts (ONDRAF/NIRAS, university)	number of meetings	average attendance rate
implantation & design	19	7	10	2	16	73 %
environment & health	17	7	8	2	8	62 %
safety	13	9	3	1	8	55 %
local development	13	8	3	2	14	59 %
<i>TOTAL</i>	62	<i>31</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>62 %</i>