

## Reaction Paper Melissa Scudo

The readings this week examined risk communication and specifically risk communication that is transboundary or across borders and cultures. The communication of risk is a delicate, sensitive and complex process involving issues of jurisdiction and the sharing of sensitive (and classified) information between nations. Risk communication is politically charged, subject to manipulation by policy-makers, the media and other actors involved with the mechanisms and facilities that contribute to the possibility of risk. All the readings to some extent touched on the importance of the elements of trust, control, or “lack of control”, familiarity and dread, and attitudes (such as arrogance) in shaping perceptions of risk and in the social amplification of risk.

In Risk Communication, Lofstedt examines Sweden’s efforts in risk communication with Denmark on the Barseback nuclear power plant, particularly in the early 1990s when there were accidents at the plant that provoked widespread security concerns about the plant’s safety and the vulnerability of Copenhagen located within 20 kilometers of the plant. Lofstedt discussed two approaches to risk communication, the conventional approach that emphasizes the role of experts taking a prominent role in persuading and convincing the public of their arguments concerning a risk. The second approach, which Lofstedt favors, emphasizes reciprocal risk communication which promotes more involvement of the public in a dialog with experts to arrive at solutions to risk acceptable to everyone.

Swedish Aid and the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant also examined perceptions of transboundary risk from the perception of Swedish and Lithuanians – both policy makers and the general public. In examining environmental aid as an instrument to manage transboundary risk, the reading illustrated how the perception of risk different among different stakeholder groups: between Lithuanian policy makers and the public, and between Lithuanians and the Swedish, and again between different groups within Sweden. The illustration of these differences in perception highlight the complexity in managing risk due to its politically charged nature and the socio-economic issues that relate to addressing matters across boundaries and cultures. Border Crossings further examined the various classifications of transboundary risks and the elements of inequality, social amplification, and trust that affect risk communication and management.

There was an interesting quote from Wildavsky in Slovic’s Perceptions of Risk that stated, “How extraordinary! The richest, longest lived, best protected, most resourceful civilization with the highest degree of insight into its own technology, is on its way to becoming the most frightened.” This reading examined studies of risk perception and the judgments that people make in characterizing and evaluating hazardous activities and technologies. The reading showed the differences in perceived risk among “experts” and different categories of people with regard to different activities, notably nuclear power because of the dramatic opposition it has engendered among the public despite experts’ assurances of its safety. The article makes an important point that risk assessment must incorporate an understanding of how individuals (and the public on a broad level) think about and respond to risk, no matter the scientific “basis” of risk for different activities or technologies.