



The Politics of Contaminated Sites Management: Institutional Regime Change and Actors' Mode of Participation in the Environmental Management of the Bonfol Chemical Waste Landfill in Switzerland

Johann Dupuis, Peter Knoepfel

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By the end of the 1970s, contaminated sites had emerged as one of the most complex and urgent environmental issues affecting industrialized countries. The authors show that small and prosperous Switzerland is no exception to the pervasive problem of sites contamination, the legacy of past practices in waste management having left some 38,000 contaminated sites throughout the country. This book outlines the problem, offering evidence that open and polycentric environmental decision-making that includes civil society actors is valuable. They propose an understanding of environmental management of contaminated sites as a political process in which institutions frame interactions between strategic actors pursuing sometimes conflicting interests.

In the opening chapter, the authors describe the influences of politics and the power relationships between actors involved in decision-making in contaminated sites management, which they term a “wicked problem.” Chapter Two offers a theoretical framework for understanding institutions and the environmental management of contaminated sites. The next five chapters present a detailed case study on environmental management and contaminated sites in Switzerland, focused on the Bonfol Chemical Landfill. The study and analysis covers the establishment of the landfill under the first generation of environmental regulations, its closure and early remediation efforts, and the gambling on the remediation objectives, methods and funding in the first decade of the 21st Century.

The concluding chapter discusses the question of whether the strength of environmental regulations, and the type of interactions between public, private, and civil society actors can explain the environmental choices in contaminated sites management. Drawing lessons from research, the authors debate the value of institutional flexibility for dealing with environmental issues such as contaminated sites.

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