

Review: Radioactive Waste Disposal at Sea

By Lasse Ringius

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Lasse Ringius. *Radioactive Waste Disposal at Sea*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001. 261 pp. ISBN 0-262-68118-8 (paperback). US\$23.95. Acid-free paper.

Most studies of environmental regimes focus on the use of power, the pursuit of rational self-interest, and the influence of scientific knowledge. This book focuses instead on the influence of public ideas and policy entrepreneurs, and makes a significant contribution by showing that, under certain circumstances, regimes can be created and changed by a combination of powerful but highly oversimplified public ideas and transnational political entrepreneurs. The careful analysis of the creation of the global ocean dumping regime in 1972 and its transformation in 1993 to include a ban on the disposal at sea of radioactive waste, persuasively demonstrates the importance of public ideas, transnational coalitions of policy entrepreneurs, and environmental non-governmental organizations. The analysis contains important insights for international environmental policy. Ringius shows how transnational coalitions of policy entrepreneurs can build environmental regimes, and how global non-governmental organizations can act as catalysts for regime change.

In this first book-length empirical study of the formation of the global ocean dumping regime in 1972 and its subsequent development, Ringius describes the structure within which global ocean dumping policy, particularly with regard to the disposal of radioactive waste, is embedded. He also examines the political construction of ocean dumping as a global environmental problem, the role of persuasion and communication in an international setting, and the formation of international public opinion. He argues not that the influence of ideas alone explains how regimes develop, but rather that it is necessary to understand how actors, interests, and ideas together influence regimes and international environmental policy.

In telling the story of how an environmental organization initiated a regime for regulating radioactive waste disposal that went against both scientific consensus and the interests of powerful states and yet ultimately triumphed, this book challenges important conventional wisdom about how international environmental regulation happens. Ringius shows the power of public ideas and policy entrepreneurs in international negotiations in a way that has implications far beyond this particular case. Forceful ideas and committed

NGOs can really make a difference.

The main beauty of this book is the collection of much recent, yet scattered, information. The information has been provided in a format with widespread relevance and appeal. Non-technical language is used throughout, and terms are explained and illustrated when appropriate. An extensive list of references and a small, yet useful, index mark the end of the book. The recommended audience of this book comprises environmentalists, ecologists, policy makers, politicians, and educators.

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