A reasoned and enriched approach to nuclear energy by the social sciences

*Investigating in the nuclear sector* ("Enquêter dans le nucléaire") renews the approach to a sector that is too often limited to risk, providing methodological solutions for conducting research in sensitive areas. Published by the *Presses Universitaires de Rennes*, this accessible read provides a wealth of knowledge about a sector that is as much about the environment and health as it is about industry. Edited by Sophie Bretesché, Stéphanie Tillement, Bénédicte Geffroy and Benoît Journé* of the Social and Management Sciences Department at IMT Atlantique, it brings together the work of some thirty researchers.

The idea for this book dates back to 2017, following the 2016 "Journées du risque" co-organized by the research consortia RITE (Emerging Risks and Technologies, from Technological Management to Social Regulation) and RESOH (Research in Safety, Organization, Humans). It aims to give an account of the wealth of research work in the social sciences dealing with the various facets of nuclear energy: around the activity of the nuclear industry, but also on the environments impacted by nuclear energy and in the vast field of health. It was an opportunity to connect the different research projects and chairs (research consortia) that have already delivered their first results: AGORAS, Labex IRON, Needs, RESOH and RITE chairs...

*Enquêter dans le nucléaire*

"Our objective was to adopt a socio-technical perspective, to look at what is happening as one would in any other sector of activity. In order to overcome controversy, the nuclear industry has been studied through a variety of materials, using an interdisciplinary approach," explains Bénédicte Geffroy, head of the Social and Management Sciences department at IMT Atlantique, which conducts research in the field of nuclear medicine. "The approach is not disembodied but is based on complementary work. And above all, the book takes a step back from the subject which is too often reduced to nuclear power plants!"

The book emphasizes that words related to the nuclear sector carry weight: its representations in novels, in the cinema and of course in the media contribute to shape our approach. The book deliberately moves away from controversies and crisis contexts to understand nuclear energy through its activities, organizations, territories and words "in everyday life".

Stéphanie Tillement, sociologist at IMT Atlantique and coordinator of the AGORAS project, emphasizes: "the book shows the different ways to study the sector ‘as close as possible to real-world applications’. This sector is so often considered to be closed off and we instead chose to adopt a scientific approach, based on robust methods." She continues: "The sector is characterized by very long timeframes and huge investments that require real long-term policy strategy, based on all the available knowledge, including that produced by academic researchers," and regrets that this is not the case for a sector that so closely affects the lives of us all, whether in terms of electricity needs, care in nuclear medicine or environmental issues, to name but a few.
The book offers a reasoned and enriched perspective on this topical subject for researchers in the field, of course, as well as academics and institutions (IRSN, EDF, CEA, ANDRA, etc.), those involved in risky activities, and finally students who are already involved in this field or who are eager to find out more.

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