Regulating the risks of mobile phone base stations

A comparative study in 5 countries

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A sociological approach to risk regulation

- Choice of 5 countries:

Adoption of ICNIRP guidelines	Yes	No (lower exposure levels)
	France UK Spain	Belgium Switzerland

- Method: policy analysis
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Local reactions as « normal incidents »

- Similar reactions in all 5 countries
- A result of network densification
- Base stations are not an exception

➔ Reactions are not the problem, their management is

A national health risk issue

- The management of local reactions to BS by:
  - Local gvt as a planning issue
  - Operators as a planning and later environmental issue
  - Central gvt as an environmental issue

➔ Enhances the dynamics of contestation

- Networking of associations and their experts via the internet
- Echoes in the media

➔ Focus on risk for health

A national political risk

- Uncertain risk ➔ political risk
- Delegation to experts asking for:
  - Not only risk assesment
  - But also advice (risk management)

➔ Divergent positions :

France	Spain	Belgium	UK	Switzerland
No risk No PP	No risk PP	No consensus	No risk PP	Plausible risk, PP

National decisions

- Result of:
  - Expert advice and consensus
  - Restrictive decisions by intermediate levels
  - Legal framework: scope of PP and health
  - Ministry in charge
  - Pressure from operators for regulation
- A constant objective: blame prevention

Risk and uncertainties

- National decisions do not solve the issue: persistance of contestations and instability
- A health risk issue is characterized by a set of uncertainties
- Each national setting produces specific capacities to reduce these uncertainties

Understanding uncertainty

- Uncertainty: lack of anticipation, knowledge and control
- Various uncertainties: scientific, social, political and judicial
- Uncertainty (danger) leads to risk when:
  - it interferes with relevant stakes (political, economic, technological, health, ...)
  - creates problems for their achievement
  - empowers actors

➔ Reducing uncertainties reduces risk

France

- Consistency between gvt, experts and courts: reduces scientific, judicial and social U. ➔ low political risk
- Local charters between operators and towns: reduce social U. ➔ manage risks
- Result: a globally stabilized situation
- Residual risk for operators: isolated local movements and delays for UMTS

UK

- Inconsistency between central gvt and experts: maintain scientific and social U. and political risk
- Courts: work in progress: no stabilization
- Consistency between gvt and operators: reduces regulatory risk
- No agreements between operators and local gvt: maintains social U.
- General situation remains unstable

Switzerland

- Consistency between central gvt, experts, cantons and courts around PP: maintains scientific U. but reduces social U. in particular at cantonal level ➔ low political risk
- Divergences between towns and cantons: maintain social U.
- Residual U. for operators: delays in local administrative procedures
- Residual risks supported by operators: levels of exposure and development in cities

Belgium

- Inconsistency between experts
- And pressure from one region
- Led to national decision based on PP: reduces scientific, judicial and social U. ➔ low political risk
- Residual U. for operators: delays in local administrative procedures

Spain

- Consistency between central gvt, experts and operators produces little effect
- Inconsistency between local, regional and central gvts: maintains high social U. and political risk
- Multiplication of trials between operators and cities: no stability ➔ maintains judicial U.

➔ Strong decoupling with local situations where EMF = cancer

➔ High risks for operators

Conclusion: managing uncertainties on a multilevel basis

- Existence of federate levels of gvt is a source of U. for central gvt
  - Adoption of PP on EMF reduces U. (CH, B)
  - Non adoption maintains instability (Sp)
- Centralized states depend on consistency between experts and national gvt as a condition for courts and local agreements to produce stability (F) or not (UK)
- When stability is reached, residual costs are externalized on operators