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Responsibility or not? Discourses around the Nuclear Power Plant Decision in Finland

This article reports on a study conducted to describe and analyse the media discourses connected with the debate that preceded the decision in 2000 to expand the use of nuclear power in Finland. The data – articles and news – were collected from two major newspapers, *Kauppalehti*, a specialised business newspaper, during the period of January 1999–December 2000, and *Helsingin Sanomat*, the major national newspaper, during November 2000.

The main aims of our study were as follows:

- To explore, from an ethical perspective, what kind of discourses were present in *Kauppalehti* and *Helsingin Sanomat* during the study period;
- To consider the power of discourses in Finnish society.

The article presents the findings of the discourse analysis of the media debate around the decision to build the fourth nuclear power plant in Finland. The analysis focussed on exploring

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the degree of responsibility revealed in this debate. Of the two newspapers used as data sources, Kauppalehti represented the supporter side of the nuclear power discussion, whereas the national newspaper was more neutral in its approach. The study presents the arguments for and against nuclear power during the government's decision-making process regarding the fourth nuclear power plant. The discourse analysis introduced three different argumentative discourses: *political power discourse*, *economic discourse* and *responsibility discourse*. The most prominent of these was the one in which nuclear power appeared as a tool for political power. Responsibility discourse concentrated on the social responsibility and environmental responsibility of the nuclear power

discussion. Economic discourse, then, emphasised nuclear power as an important economic issue, and the arguments were mainly about, and on behalf of, the international competitiveness of Finland.

The main conflicts in the nuclear power discussion were related to industrial and economic growth, safety of society, quality of life, welfare, and global warming of the earth. Nuclear catastrophe was a frequent and noticeable argument against nuclear power. A surprising finding was that technical or economic facts were not sufficient arguments when questions and concerns expanded to societal issues. Technical information did not satisfy all stakeholder groups. ■