

Dilemma: fracking in the EU

Moral dilemma

The dilemma that exist on the topic of fracking in the EU is the tradeoff between the production energy with limited CO₂ emissions (and, in a broader perspective, the reduction of climate change) and that of concerns of individual safety and health.

Emotions at play and responses from governments and companies

The emotions that are at play is fear. This fear is directed at that of personal safety, health and the environment. The fear of safety originates from the effects the drilling of natural gas. This has already caused earthquakes and damaged individual and public property. It is feared fracking will cause similar events to happen. The fear related to personal health is the result of the contamination of the water supply by the chemicals used in the process. As the water supply has already been affected in some instances in the US, it is feared the same will happen in the EU. The fear for environmental damage is closely related to the fear of personal health. As with personal health, it is believe the chemicals used in the process will negatively affect the environment. Given the violent nature of the chemicals used this might be correct.

Governments have had mixed reactions on whether or not fracking should be allowed. Some governments have started experiments with this technique on a small scale, outright forbid the use of fracking or decided to postpone the decision to a later moment.

Companies on the other hand have been promoting this technology by focusing on the positive effects this new technology could have on decreasing carbon emissions.

How I would address the dilemma

I would address the dilemma in the following three ways: postpone the decision on whether or not allow fracking, listen to the voiced concerns and try to develop more sustainable methods for fracking.

Postponement of the decision regarding legalizing fracking by governments is needed at this point, given the responsibility they have towards the people. As this relatively new technology has not been tested extensively it is needed to further investigate this technique before allowing it. By allowing experimentation in the US, the EU can learn from their experience and avoid potential harm. This NIMBY approach to policy is acceptable as there are currently realistic alternatives available for the energy production or acquisition.

Listening to the voiced concerns of civilians makes them feel being taken seriously. This focus on emotions (as opposed to facts) is more effective than just providing facts. This also makes citizens feel to

be on equal footing with government officials and experts which helps them in accepting any decisions made on this topic.

Develop more sustainable methods of fracking would allow for value sensitive design to take up the niche of energy production. As the main dilemma focusses on safe (carbon neutral) energy production, other methods might provide more viable. These options can be explored before follow-up policy decisions on fracking are made. These initiatives might be self-started by groups of concerned citizens or by state-subsidized initiatives.