**Paper Title:** Public Participation in Japan's Nuclear Energy Policy Making Process: Pre and Post Fukushima

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**Abstract**

*Abstract text (no more than 500 words with no figures or tables)*

This presentation will consider the past, present and future of public participation in Japan’s nuclear energy and energy policy forming processes. It will examine innovations in public participation following the 1995 sodium accident at the Monju Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor and compare and contrast them with the more radical approaches that followed the far more serious Fukushima nuclear accident.

After the Monju accident a series of Round Table Conferences were held. Those conferences were almost the first time critical voices and voices from the general public had been sought in Japan’s nuclear energy policy forming process. They led to some cosmetic procedural changes, but not to substantive policy changes.

After the Fukushima accident the government initiated a policy review, which culminated in a so-called “national debate” about energy policy in July/August 2012. The national debate represented a departure from past participatory practices, not least because of the use of the deliberative polling method as one of several components of the total process.

The national debate showed a clear public preference for a phase out of nuclear energy and, in combination with the large-scale demonstrations that were taking place at the same time, induced the government to set a goal of zero nuclear energy by the end of the 2030s. However that goal was immediately brought into question by the failure to back it up with a clear cabinet endorsement. With the subsequent change of government the policy debate has been returned to square one, but many people believe that the new government cannot simply dismiss the outcome of last year’s national debate.

In this presentation participation is defined broadly to include both official and unofficial processes and the term ‘participant’ refers to any person or organization that seeks to engage with the policy debate,
either within or outside official channels. Expanding the focus of public participation in this way recognizes citizens as potential initiators of participation, rather than seeing them simply as responders. In the context of the post-Fukushima energy policy review, it enables us to identify synergies between the protest movement and the government-sponsored national debate.

The results of the 16 December 2012 national election, which appeared on the face of it to contradict the outcome of the national debate on energy policy that took place just a few months earlier, highlight the ambiguous position of participatory democracy within the context of representative democracy in Japan. Drawing on interviews with people directly involved in Japan’s nuclear energy and energy policy review processes, and based on an analysis of the strengths and limitations of the national debate, this presentation will offer some tentative interpretations of the place of public participation in this particular case and in the ongoing debate about Japan’s nuclear energy and energy policy. In doing so it will compare the merits and demerits of so-called “deliberative” approaches to participation with other approaches.