

SOCIAL RESEARCH ON FUSION

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WHY SOCIAL RESEARCH ON FUSION?

Collecting scientific evidence on the human, social and ethical dimensions in energy systems is a fundamental tool for understanding (and intervening in) the acceptance of energy technologies, the siting of energy generation facilities, and the promotion of measures for risk mitigation and safety. The key role of social research in energy fully aligns contemporary EU-wide policy discourses on 'Science with and for society' and 'Responsible Research and Innovation'. In the fusion domain, and since 1996, a specific research program- currently known as SES (Socio-economic Studies) has been dealing with the social and economic dimension of fusion. SES social research has so far focussed on generating evidence regarding the conditions for social acceptance of fusion, as a research endeavour and as a future energy source – as well as the barriers and constraints for acceptance and suitable energy governance. Stakeholder engagement, lay attitudes and media analysis are our three main fields of research.

WHAT DOES SES-SOCIAL RESEARCH DO?

(A) Lay Attitudes

- Cross-cultural qualitative research (Hybrid Research Methods)
- Quantitative research (Survey-based)

(B) Stakeholder Engagement

- Organization of reflection groups with 'informed civil society'
- Research to improve communication tools

(C) Media Analysis & Framing

- Cross-country media analysis (printed and internet)
- Media framing (in Belgium)

SOME KEY FINDINGS

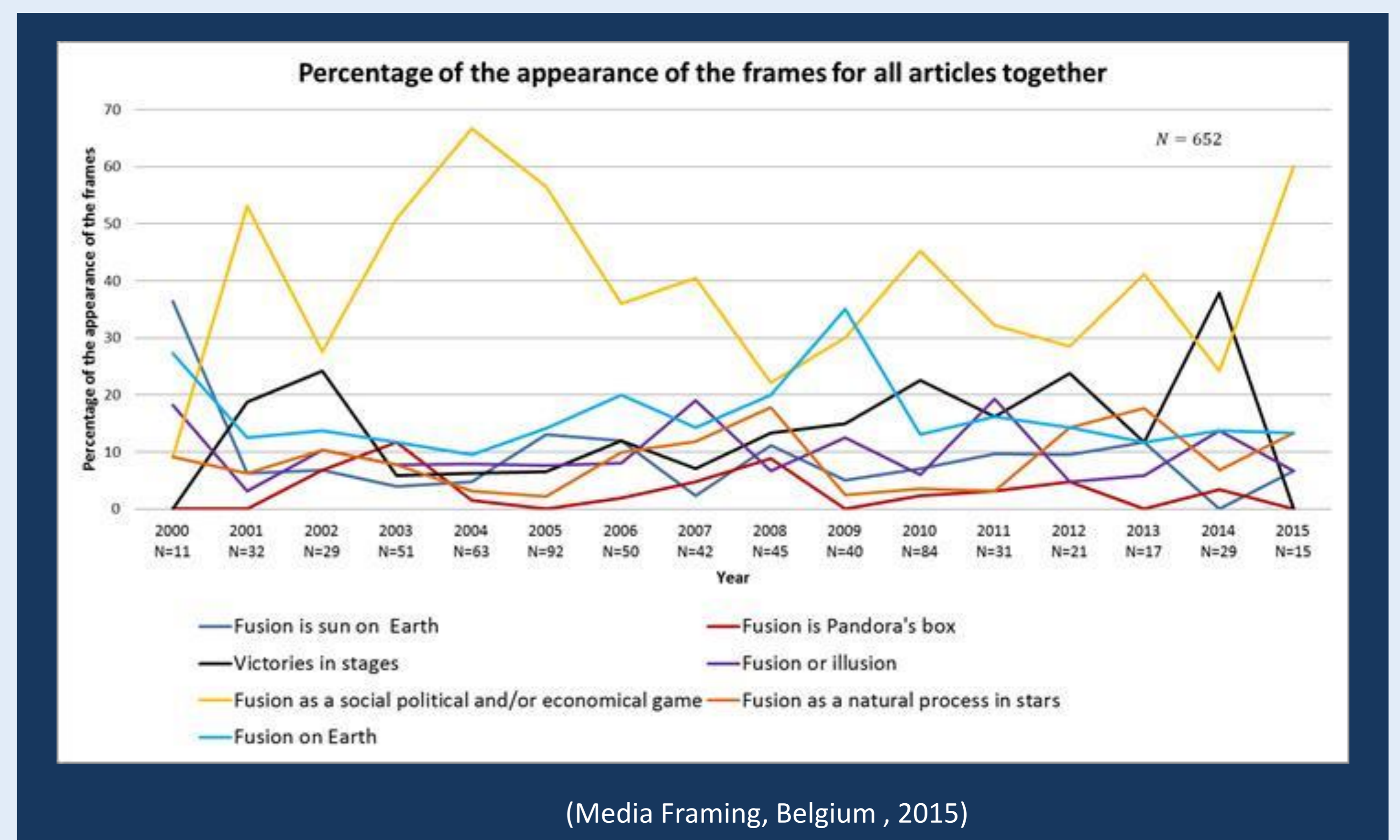
A. **Qualitative Research** (Reconvened Focus Groups in the UK and Spain, 2010) illustrates that lay perceptions of fusion change as citizens learn more, but changes are not consistent. Knowledge does not necessarily lead to more support for fusion. There is a need to engage citizens with multiple sources of knowledge and uncertainty (just good news is not good). The most recent **Quantitative Research** (Section dedicated to fusion in a large scale survey (N>1000) with a representative sample of the Belgian population, 2015) shows that lay people see fusion mostly in scientific/technical terms, even if the dominant frame in the Belgian printed media (main information source) presented fusion mostly as a 'social or political game'.



B. **Dialogues with informed civil society**, an essential SES research practice, focuses on aspects of energy foresight research that are relevant to all technologies. Recently, societal dialogues deals with the use of scenario modelling and storylines.

Fusion Communicators are uneven across Research Units in terms of number and profiles. Most envisage their role as providing information and education, not as promoting dialogue or engagement between scientists and citizens. On-going work aims to provide evidence-based support to more efficient communication tools: web, exhibitions, etc.

C. **Print media coverage** of fusion energy (Germany, Spain, Portugal and international press, 2008-2012) showed that fusion is portrayed as safe, clean and unlimited. It is clearly disassociated from traditional nuclear (fission) with a dominant positive approach. **Media framing** (Belgium, 2000-2015) shows fusion mostly as an event, not as a process. Most articles deals with policy behind fusion, although it is getting prominence as a scientific enterprise. Fusion is presented as achievement in steps, but every step makes fusion more possible



WHAT ARE THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUSION COMMUNITY

Social Research generates scientific evidence on the conditions for the social acceptance of fusion as a research endeavour and as a future energy source: to promote engagement of the fusion community with stakeholders and the public; to enhance the communication strategies of fusion research; and to make fusion research more responsive to societal concerns.



This work has been carried out within the framework of the EUROfusion Consortium and has received funding from the Euratom research and training programme 2014-2018 under grant agreement No 633053. The views and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission.



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