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Social Research on Fusion

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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. Furthermore, this key role of social research in energy fully aligns with proposals for more open and responsive modes of research and science policy-making, as illustrated by 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 the socio-economic dimension of fusion. The SES social research has so far focussed on generating evidence regarding the conditions for social acceptance of fusion - currently as a research endeavour and in the future as an energy source –as well as the barriers and constraints for acceptance and suitable energy governance. Stakeholder engagement, lay attitudes and media analysis and media framing are our three main fields of research.

This paper presents the key challenges and findings from social research on fusion together with its very practical implications for the fusion community, such as promoting the engagement of the fusion community with stakeholders and the public, enhancing the communication strategies of fusion research, including additional variables in the economic model of the global energy system or making fusion research more responsive to societal concerns.

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