

Engaging with Society - Past, Present and Future. Results from the collaborative interdisciplinary project HoNESt - History of Nuclear Energy and Society

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Across Europe, but also internationally, the record of nuclear energy's relations with the public has varied considerably and will most likely continue to do so. The purpose of the Horizon 2020 – Euratom Fission-funded project HoNESt – History of Nuclear Energy and Society (2015-2018) has been to explore and analyse the differences and explain the factors that account for them. Bringing together an interdisciplinary, international team of researchers from 23 renowned research institutions in Europe and the United States, HoNESt has undertaken comparative and transnational historical and social science research on 20 countries and a number of international organisations. HoNESt has examined the way they have dealt with societies, and how societies have responded to the advent, presence and development of nuclear technology since the 1950s.

Presenting the outcome of 2 ½ years of intensive research, this paper will outline three sets of findings:

First, with a view to the past, clear lessons that can be drawn from the comparison of historical experiences in Europe and the United States, and from cross-cutting transnational case studies. For instance, nuclear installations sited at national borders have created very different responses on each side of this divide. Such cases provide unique insights into what shapes nuclear engagement, conflicts and debates, and help understand the reasons for this variation.

Second, with a view to the present, based on the rich empirical basis amassed by HoNESt in a long-term perspective, HoNESt's social science team has singled out a number of key mechanisms facilitating or inhibiting successful public engagement, while being crucially aware that nuclear energy is operating in extremely different societal contexts across Europe, which in turn feature their own path dependencies.

Thirdly, with a view to the future, HoNESt researchers have engaged with a broad range of societal stakeholders. They have discussed HoNESt research results, and developed and assessed scenarios of engagement futures. Combining stakeholder engagement and self-reflexive research, HoNESt thus greatly advances the development of societal engagement with nuclear technology.

These findings will be highly relevant for nuclear stakeholders, regardless of whether they are building or operating nuclear facilities, or are involved in decommissioning or nuclear waste management.