

Understanding the inter-relationship between public perception and public engagement in nuclear issues: A cross-country comparative analysis

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Key factors underlying public perception of risks and benefits of nuclear energy, such as the role of trust and the influence of previous affective feelings, values or beliefs, have been widely highlighted by the literature. Grounded on these previous findings, and also on the main theoretical approaches to risk perception (e.g. psychometric paradigm, cultural theory, interpretative approaches, governance models), we propose an integrative model able to describe the relationship between key public perception factors and different public engagement strategies such as communication, consultation, or participation.

We illustrate this model with data about public perception and social engagement from a sample of 8 countries (Germany, Spain, Sweden, UK, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Finland, and USA), representing different historical contexts in the development of nuclear energy and social responses to it. Our data come from the 'History of Nuclear Energy and Society' (HONEST) research project funded by the European Commission under the H2020 Programme (GA 662268). The methodology of the project is based on two phases. The first phase has been devoted to gather facts and figures to describe the nuclear history of each country, focusing particularly on nuclear-society relationships. The second phase aims to analyse these data from a risk perception perspective. The main findings first shed light on perceptions of risks and benefits related with health, safety, environment, and economics. Second, we will be discussing the large variety of contextual, sociocultural and political-institutional factors shaping public reactions pro and against nuclear issues. Based on this multi-scaling analysis, we conclude with remarks on how risk perception frames societal engagement activities in those countries included in our sample.