

ENERGISE

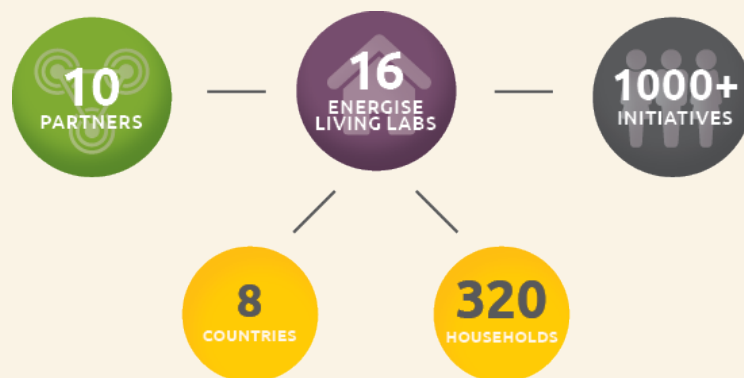
EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR RESEARCH, GOOD PRACTICE
AND INNOVATION FOR SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

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INTEGRATING SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH WITH EU ENERGY POLICY-MAKING

POLICY BRIEF AND RECOMMENDATIONS



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KEY MESSAGES

- There is a distinctive and valuable contribution to be made by qualitative social sciences and humanities research to informing EU energy policies for demand reduction, i.e. by emphasising the need to understand and change energy-related practice cultures
- The contribution to energy policy of SSH remains unfulfilled, partly due to misconceptions about the energy demand challenge
- The potential contribution of SSH is not fully realised, due to a partial understanding of the nature, role and potential integration of qualitative SSH energy research
- Misunderstandings about SSH and the energy challenge are rooted in the imaginaries and problem framings employed by policy-makers and funders; this view is supported by data collected by ENERGISE on energy research funding and SSH researchers' experiences
- A new imaginary can provide a framework for better understanding challenges of energy research and policy integration

Context: SSH-energy policy integration: the challenges

The background to this briefing concerns the effectiveness of EU and national member state policies to realise the energy transition and how best to understand and to tackle the social and technical challenges which need to be overcome in order to do so. **Fundamental issues** involve the integration of energy policy with other EU and national policies, the integration of social scientific knowledge with that generated by science disciplines and how such findings inform EU energy policy-making. They concern the following **challenges**:

- How to tackle the **fragmentation** of the European energy system
- The need for **collective action at the EU level** on the international stage as well as better coordination of the energy policies of individual member states
- How best to **leverage social sciences and humanities research** to inform and support the EU Energy Union, in order to prioritise and **achieve energy demand reduction** objectives and **to realise the energy transition**

Approach and Analysis

In a first strand of work, the researchers conducted a **review of relevant literature** on EU energy policy integration and European Commission-funded energy research. This helped to shed light on the funding, nature, expectations and policy impact of social sciences energy research. (The full report is in Genus and Iskandarova 2018, which builds on work conducted for ENERGISE on problem framings, reported in Jensen et al. 2017).

In a second strand of the study, the research team designed a **questionnaire**, which was completed by a sample of social scientists working on energy demand and sustainable consumption in EU member countries and Switzerland. This generated data on national research funders, research centres and over 60 recently undertaken research projects.

Data analysis was informed by the sociotechnical imaginaries approach. In this approach, imaginaries ‘project visions of what is good and worth attaining’ in policy (Sovacool and Hess 2017: 719). Methodologically, sociotechnical imaginaries approaches are well suited to critical investigation of the meanings attached to, institutionalisation of, and change in EU energy and research funding policies.

Jasanoff and Kim (2009) refer to **six dimensions** that may be employed in the analysis of sociotechnical imaginaries. The dimensions are: a) **framing of societal challenges** and opportunities which SSH energy research might address; b) **policy focus** – e.g. as present in the text of research work programmes and calls for funding; c) **controversies** – over what do they arise; d) **stakes** – what could be won or lost in resolving controversies; e) **closures** – how the issues at stake are or will be resolved; and f) **civic epistemologies** – e.g. the prominence and legitimacy of quantitative and qualitative research methods and processes governing relations among state authorities, experts and civil society.

The deliverable concludes that the contribution to be made by SSH research to informing the EU and national policies regarding energy demand reduction and governance of the energy systems remains unfulfilled. The reasons for this are rooted in the dominant imaginary and problem framings employed by policy-makers, funders and others, regarding the nature and role of social sciences energy research. The **prevailing imaginary supports a policy focus on technical efficiency and individual choices** made by consumers. This is

echoed in research funding which undervalues qualitative social sciences and emphasises science, technology and engineering research and positivist, quantitative social sciences.

Different elements of the prevailing imaginary are shown in the right hand column of the table below. These may be compared with those of an alternative imaginary, shown in the column to the left of the dominant imaginary. The **alternative imaginary emphasises a policy focus on changing practice cultures, and co-creation of knowledge in the responsible governance of energy systems.**

Comparing Two EU Energy Policy Imaginaries

	Alternative Imaginary: Practice Cultures	Dominant Imaginary: Technological and Behavioural Change
Framing risks	Technological failure; need to understand energy-related practice cultures	Technical challenges; need for social acceptability
Policy focus	Changes in energy practice cultures; participatory governance	Energy efficiency; increase uptake of renewable energy technologies
Controversies	Competing understandings of (how to change) energy-related practice cultures	Ensuring behaviour change; consumer choice
Stakes	Realising the energy transition through responsible governance	Competitiveness; buy-in of customers
Closures	EU and national policies and interventions predicated on changing practice cultures	Technical energy efficiency innovations; policy measures to 'nudge' individual choices
Civic epistemologies	Understanding energy practice cultures through co-creation of knowledge	Enabling consumers to make 'better' energy choices

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Measures required

- **New imaginaries of energy policy and the contribution of SSH research** should be articulated and adopted, in order to improve the contribution of SSH energy research to tackling EU and member state energy challenges.
- Policy-makers and funders should **devise and fund research and other initiatives which further articulate new imaginaries** and how they might be implemented and diffused.
- Policy and other actors should together **open up the discursive space**, in which the foci and processes of energy demand reduction policy-making and research, are debated. SSH research can shed light on how best to accomplish this.

References

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WHO WE ARE

The ENERGISE consortium includes ten research partners (universities, research institutes, enterprises and NGOs) from Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Slovenia, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.



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