



PERSON expert-meeting: Innovative perspectives from Social Sciences and Humanities on energy transition

Sustainable Energy Week Brussels, June 14 2016

On the 14th of June 2016, Social Sciences and Humanities research on energy was bolstered as PERSON (the Platform for Energy Research in the Socio-economic Nexus) held its third meeting during the Sustainable Energy Week in Brussels. This meeting was titled “Innovative perspectives on energy transition: presenting the state-of-the-art of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) research and the PERSON strategic research agenda”. During the meeting, the need for -and contributions made by- SSH research were discussed. In addition, members of the PERSON platform presented the state-of-the-art on different perspectives of Social Sciences and Humanities research as well as a Strategic Integrated Research Agenda.

After a warm welcome by moderator Jan Paternotte in the beautiful Solvay Library, Gerd Schönwalder, a policy officer at the Directorate-General Research and Innovation of the European Commission, stressed the importance of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) research to promote a sustainable energy transition. He emphasized that the transition to a low carbon energy system is a complex societal problem, and not merely a technical problem. Within Horizon 2020, SSH considerations cut across and inform all key energy challenges. For this purpose, a dialogue between Social Sciences and Humanities, Technological Sciences, and practitioners (governments, industry, NGOs) is needed.

Next, Linda Steg, professor of Environmental Psychology at the University of Groningen and PERSON coordinator, presented the PERSON platform to the wider audience. She discussed the mission of PERSON to unite and advise on European top-class SSH energy research on the human dimensions of sustainable energy transition to promote a secure, clean and efficient energy system. The PERSON-platform aims to bring together independent experts

from Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) from all over Europe who represent the top of research on energy in their field. Besides, representatives of the National Science Foundations will help organise and strengthen SSH research communities across Europe. PERSON aims to integrate and share knowledge on ways to encourage a sustainable energy transition among different SSH disciplines, and to propose a Strategic Integrated Research Agenda to address important open questions for research.

After the coffee break, William D'Haeseleer, professor of engineering science and director of the KU Leuven Energy Institute, Sverker Jagers, professor of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg and Sabine Pahl, associate professor in Psychology at Plymouth University highlighted the essential contributions that SSH can make in energy research.

These five inspiring presentations were followed by a panel discussion in which the audience had an active role. The panelists were Olivia Woolley (University of Aberdeen), Gert-Jan van der Panne (R&Dialogue) and Marcus van Leeuwen (NWO – the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research). The main focus was on innovation and impact. How can SSH contribute to solutions that will make a difference in people's daily lives? The panelists as well as the audience shared their ideas and offered concrete examples.

That SSH researchers think their research matters will hardly come as a surprise. But what the meeting showed is that engineers too, increasingly acknowledge the essential role that the Social Sciences and Humanities has to play. SSH provides essential insights in how to encourage a sustainable energy transition, a message that can nowadays be heard in technical circles just as often as in SSH environments. A key issue for the future remains how to build bridges between different SSH disciplines themselves and establish cooperation with the technical disciplines. Encouraged by the progress that has been made since its inception, the PERSON platform will continue to facilitate the dialogue within SSH and between SSH and other disciplines and practice, to promote the use of key insights from SSH into policy making and practice, and to set an integrated SSH research agenda across Europe.