

Public perceptions of CCS in context: results of *NearCO₂* focus groups in the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain and Poland

Researchers

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Method

Focus groups were held with the general public for the EU FP7 *NearCO₂* project on public perceptions and understanding of CCS in six European countries (one group per country). Opinion was allowed to develop and was observed while each group was incrementally exposed to a specially-commissioned DVD. The DVD provided an overview of CCS, its rationale and arguments for and against the technology.

Information content

CCS was described in the context of climate urgency, other low carbon options and alternative opinion on CCS. Additional, country-specific information was provided on electricity supply mixes and the role of CCS as a bridging technology. The films and additional material will be freely available on the *NearCO₂* website.

Focus group quotations

“It seems all it is doing is putting a temporary sticking plaster on what’s happening.” (Spain)

“Can we not capture the CO₂ when it gets into the atmosphere and shoot it out to space?” (UK)

“I believe it could be a temporary solution while we develop renewable technologies.” (Poland)

“Will the storage be stable for a long time?” (Netherlands)

“It does not give me a good impression... We postpone a problem by moving it elsewhere.” (Belgium)

“Generally, I would switch to water or solar energy, to anything that is natural, completely natural and unlimited availability”. (Germany)

Key results

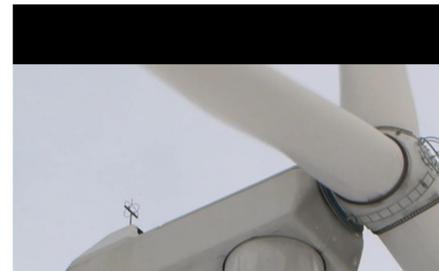
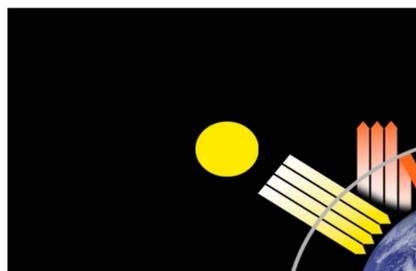
- There were more similarities than differences in opinion across the six countries
- The results confirmed many previous studies: a strong preference for renewables and strong concern about the safety risks of CO₂ leakage
- The role of facilitators or moderators is critical: misconceptions and counter-opinions quickly proliferated
- It will not be easy to prevent this in everyday contexts
- Public understanding of the nature of CO₂ is limited
- Not all concerns are based on misconceptions

Implications for communications practice

The case for CCS, and reassurance on the risks posed by CO₂ leakage, will need to be made more convincingly, fully and overtly, particularly for directly affected European publics.

In so far as the focus groups simulated the consequences of exposure to information on CCS without expert-moderation, they illustrate the importance of involving trusted parties in CCS communication processes, with the objective of anticipating and ideally moderating and responding to concerns as they arise.

DVD screenshots



“Whilst carbon capture is no silver bullet, it has the potential to play an important role in global effort to cut carbon emissions.”
Dr Dan Barlow,
Head of Policy at WWF Scotland

“Ultimately, it is a classic ‘end of pipe’ solution that involves storing the waste rather than eliminating it.”
Sonja Meister,
Friends of the Earth Europe