

Credibility of scientific expertise and decision-making

New challenges for health risk governance in a changing world

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ABSTRACT FRAMING SESSION - WEDNESDAY 20TH JANUARY 2021

Expertise and democracy: coping with mistrust

Daniel Agacinski (France Stratégie)

Because the task of expertise is to render knowledge in a form useful for decision-making and action, it bears issues of power as much as of knowledge. This largely explains why it can give rise to mistrust: doubts about the expert's word stem from concerns about how it may be used by those in positions of power, whether public or private.

While the expertise situation implies a form of trust in the person consulted as an expert, democratic regimes require governments to exercise their responsibility under the watchful – and sometimes mistrustful – gaze of their constituents. The difficulty arises when this mistrust takes such a form as to hinder the implementation of public policies, especially those in the field of health or the environment, which require active citizen participation.

What can then be done, to use the common expression, «to restore trust»? Is this simply an achievable goal? Or would it not be better to learn to «cope with mistrust»? By this we mean understand the drivers of these manifestations of mistrust and take the words of mistrust into account when producing the expertise itself, to make it more relevant, accessible and robust.



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