

Credibility of scientific expertise and decision-making

New challenges for health risk governance in a changing world

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ABSTRACT BREAK OUT SESSION - MONDAY 8TH FEBRUARY 2021

8 - Social mobilisation, science and expertise: between participation and contestation

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The last decade has seen greater interaction, and even collaboration, between the traditional players in risk assessment and risk management, and a multitude of social players. Citizens, local residents and voluntary associations are increasingly taking part in expertise processes, whether in the context of industrial accidents, surveillance and monitoring, or long-term dialogue processes within government agencies dealing with health and environmental issues. Sometimes referred to as «citizen science», this growing participation of stakeholders and non-experts requires us to reassess and broaden both the expertise processes in the strict sense, and the standards and practices used to generate knowledge about health and environmental risks. In particular, there is a need to articulate the emerging forms of «popular epidemiology», based on local surveys relating to clusters of cancer or other hazards and conducted by or in partnership with local residents, using standard epidemiological methods based on large samples, robust statistics and long periods of time.

These situations confront agencies with major difficulties due to the limitations of the standard «one substance, one cause, one effect» approach in contexts potentially involving many unknown factors: lifestyles, differentiated exposures, cocktail effects, perception and feeling of risks, underlying political and land planning conflicts, etc. Obviously, these methodological and political conflicts cannot just be reduced to simple «communication» problems. In this workshop, we will address various specific situations whose complexity and often conflicting nature require the involvement of a multitude of players who were hitherto excluded from the expertise and risk assessment process.



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