

## 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 20<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2021

# Scientific Contribution to Risk Governance and Communication in Times of Post-factual - Confusion and Pandemic Crisis

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The rise of populism and corresponding political resonance in Europe and the USA is precarious because it is threatening democracy and science. Many political decision-making processes are based on evidence and expert knowledge. However, we recently observe that expert knowledge and its use in public policy arenas have become contested in public policy making. Populist movements draw on contortion, falsehood and fabrication of facts in order to influence public opinion and enhance their power. Many political and social actors discredit well-grounded knowledge as “fake news” or conspiracy theory; they bring alternative facts and truth into play. This has been particularly true in the response to the Corona crisis where absurd conspiracy theories (such as QAnon) flourish alongside allegations by the outspoken vaccination opposition and right-wing extremists. The rest of the public is often confused and lacks orientation.

It has become more difficult to acknowledge the importance of robust knowledge stemming from science, scholarship and expertise. Concomitant with that problem is an increasing polarization and the impression of arbitrariness when every expertise is followed by counter-studies or alternative facts.

The paper will address the challenges for risk governance and risk communication under post-factual conditions as they unfold in the present pandemic crisis. It will highlight the issue of scientific evidence and its relationship to policy making. In addition, it will discuss the issue of social inclusion by integrating lay knowledge and alternative expertise into policy arenas as part of a more open, participatory and deliberative form of risk decision-making. This debate needs to be revisited in light of the new insights into complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity of scientific research. What are reasonable and acceptable limits of scientific expertise and lay knowledge? How much can you “democratize” scientific expertise without losing the rigor of creating robust knowledge? How can we conceptualize the effects of post-truth in the practice of risk knowledge production and use? The paper will provide orientation for these questions and draw some lessons for governance and communication.



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