

Workshop: *Ignorance and non-knowledge: what consequences for democratic governance, politics and policy?*

November 13-14, 2018, University of Vienna, Austria

Confirmed keynote speakers

Linsey McGoey (University of Essex)

Matthias Gross (University of Jena, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research – UFZ)

Stefan Böschen (RWTH Aachen)

Call for papers

Ignorance and non-knowledge have become the subject of a growing body of research in the social sciences and humanities, giving rise to a new “sociology of ignorance.” In this line of thought, ignorance is not merely a consequence of the limits of our knowledge practices, but a knowledge practice in its own right. Concepts such as McGoey’s ‘strategic unknowns’ also challenge the assumption that power thrives only on information: In this perspective, ignorance and non-knowledge are often actively produced, cultivated, and exploited as a resource and a strategy.

While engagements with ignorance and non-knowledge have become more salient over the past decade, there are different conceptual understandings of these phenomena across disciplines. To begin with, sociologists of ignorance have highlighted the importance of non-knowledge practices as a resource for industry actors. Moreover, political sociologists, such as Matthias Gross, have recently made more explicit links between Beck’s concept of ‘risk society’, ignorance studies, and contemporary governance of risks and security. From a slightly different perspective, political scientists approach uncertainty – sometimes termed ‘contingency’ – as an inherent *condition* or even *mechanism* of governance, rather than an instrumentally negotiated *outcome* of governance.

This workshop takes these different understandings and concepts as points of departure and seeks to spark an interdisciplinary dialogue. In doing so, we seek to enhance our understanding of non-knowledge practices and their consequences for democratic governance, politics and policy. We expect issues of ignorance and non-knowledge to be particularly pertinent in areas such as environmental policy and climate change, the regulation of financial markets, public health, migration, research governance, and the governance challenges arising in response to increasing digitalization and automation, to name but a few. Specific questions of interest are:

- What relevance do different understandings of ignorance, contingency and uncertainty have for the study of governance?

- What practices of governing unknowable or unknown objects, and futures, can be discerned empirically?
- What strategies of action or inaction do non-knowledge and/or uncertainty provoke on the part of governance actors, and where and how can we identify such strategies?
- How do non-knowledge practices challenge or reinforce governance practices?
- What taxonomies of knowledge practices emerge in particular case studies and policy areas, and what do these practices mean for our understandings of governance in contemporary democracies?
- How are unknowns and uncertainties currently addressed in different policy arenas and research practices, and with what consequences?

Participants

We invite scholars and early-career researchers to explore these questions conceptually, through empirical case studies in different fieldwork settings, or both. This may include perspectives from a range of disciplines, such as political science, anthropology, sociology, geography, history and STS.

Abstract submission

Abstracts should be submitted as a Word document to ignorance-workshop@univie.ac.at, no later than **31 August 2018** and should contain approximately **250 words**. In addition, please include your title, your position and institution, and explain in 3-5 sentences what your specific interest is in the topic to focus our attention to particular issues or themes. We will notify you if your abstract is successful by mid-September. If accepted, we will ask you to submit an extended abstract (i.e. 1000-2000 words) in advance of the workshop (mid-October), to be shared with other participants. The sharing of these short papers will help inform a productive discussion.

Format

We envisage a small workshop, with sufficient room for comments and discussion.

There will be a public panel discussion with Matthias Gross, Stefan Böschen and Ulrike Felt (tbc) and practitioners on November 13. Day 2 will feature a keynote by Linsey McGoey.

Organisers

The workshop is organised by Katharina T. Paul, Ingrid Metzler, Erik Aarden (University of Vienna), and Helene Sorgner (AAU Klagenfurt). The Key Research Area 'Knowledge societies in turbulent times' (Faculty of Social Sciences) of the University of Vienna has generously

agreed to co-fund the workshop, and additional funding will come from the FWF Austrian Science Fund (Grant #VA561).

Output

We anticipate a publication composed of selected papers from the workshop in an interdisciplinary social science journal.

Attendance

Attendance is free of cost to invited participants. Lunch and refreshments will be provided on both days, and there will be a networking and social event on the evening of the 13th November. Regrettably, we are unable to fund any bursaries.

Draft Programme

Day One (Tuesday 13 November)

13:00 Arrival and welcome

13:15 – 14:45 Panel Session One: Concepts and mechanisms (3-4 papers)

- Coffee break

15:00 – 16:45 Panel Session Two: Case studies (3-4 papers)

- Informal networking (drinks & snacks) – for interested participants, move to different location for public panel discussion

17:30 – 19:30 Public panel discussion (details TBC)

20:00 Dinner (self-funded, but pre-organized)

Day Two (Wednesday 14 November)

9:00 – 9:30 Coffee and networking

9:30 – 10:45 Keynote: Linsey McGoey

- Coffee break

11:00 – 13:00 Panel Session Three: (3-4 papers)

- Lunch Break

14:00 – 15:45 Panel Session Four: (3-4 papers)

16:00 – 17:00 Wrapping Up by Matthias Gross, Future Steps for Publication

Optional: Informal coffee/drinks, OR: departure for train station/airport