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# Workshop on Ignorance and Non-Knowledge: What Consequences for Democratic Governance, Politics and Policy?

**13-14  
November  
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 Bösch** (RWTH Aachen)

**Ulrike Felt** (University of Vienna, Department of Science and Technology Studies)

## 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?

## Abstract submission

Abstracts should be submitted as a Word document to [ignorance-workshop@univie.ac.at](mailto:ignorance-workshop@univie.ac.at), not later than 31 August 2018 and should contain approximately 250 words.

## Organization & Funding

The workshop is organised by Katharina T. Paul, Ingrid Metzler, Erik Aarden (University of Vienna), and Helene Sorgner (University of Klagenfurt).

**The workshop starts on 13 November at 13:00 and ends on 14 November at 17:00.**

Regrettably, we are unable to provide any travel stipends, but meals and refreshments will be covered thanks to funding provided by the Key Research Area 'Knowledge societies in turbulent times' (Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Vienna) and the FWF Austrian Science Fund (Grant #VA561).

**Universität Wien**

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