

Risk communication in post trust societies

Presented at the meeting:

Towards Robust European Air Pollution Policies: Constraints and prospects for a wider dialogue between scientists, experts, decision-makers and citizens

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Risk issues are getting increased media attention

- Farmed salmon scare
- Bird flu
- MMR vaccine
- Mobile telephones

What is happening?

- Growing level of public distrust toward regulators/policy makers
- Public demanding access to information-want to make their own decisions
- Public trusting others-NGOs
 - **Pluralism of science**
 - **Amplification of risk by media**
 - **Pluralism of information sources**

What are the main drivers?

Researchers (specifically Fischhoff, Renn, Sjoberg, Slovic, and White) uncovered a series of drivers that influence how the public perceive risks:

- Voluntary-involuntary
- Natural-technological
- Control-non control
- High probability and low consequence risk vis-à-vis low probability and high consequence risk (dread)
- Familiar-non familiar

Drivers continued:

- Reproductive organs-non reproductive organs
- Children-no children
- Trust-no trust
- Male-female
- White-non white
- Fair-not fair

Research led to interest:

Governments and industry alike too the view that we now know how the public perceive risks

Therefore lets develop communication strategies with our understanding of how people perceive risks

Three types of risk communication strategies

- Top down
One way presentation of facts
- Dialogue
Two way form of persuasive communication
- Bottom-up
Stakeholders communicate from local-national-international levels

New thinking and theories

To date many of the implemented risk communication programmes have not worked

It is difficult to size and build hazardous installations or any large infrastructure projects

Academics have identified several reasons for this

- Social amplification of risk
 - Risks can be socially amplified or attenuated
- Narrative approach
 - People like anecdotes
- Trust
 - Need to establish trust

Why is this of relevance to this workshop?

Why dialogue/communication?

How do we develop a wider dialogue with scientists, experts, decision makers and citizens

- When

Decision makers, scientists, experts (or their institutions) are not trusted by citizens

- When

Media is amplifying risks and attenuating benefits

- When

Public is not interested in a dialogue

So what can we do?

- Recommendations need to re-establish trust
- Realise that trust is composed of Fairness, Competence, Efficiency
- Measure for trust and act accordingly

Understand how the media works

- Work with media
- Treat media as friends
- Provide media unbiased information
- Develop media guidelines

Public(s) are rational responding to the information they receive

(taking into account heuristics and biases we all have)

Develop tools to increase public participation in dialogues (but these have to be real and not facades)

Self selection problem at present

Conclusions

- All publics are affected by a number of risk factors
- Trust is the key factor-without trust no dialogue
- Need to re-establish trust
- No such thing as a formula for risk communication