Between expertise and emotions: postfactual lesson for evidence-based policy-making

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The current boundaries of liberal democracy

• Increasing polarization of society

• Increasing focus on personal wishes and well-being

• Tension between individual wishes and public institution regulating our lives
Citizen and their institutions

"Wenn die Stimmung aufgewühlt ist und Emotionen im Spiel sind, ist es meistens richtig, tief durchzuatmen und Abstand zu gewinnen"
Institutions: defined through their reasoning, evidence- and knowledge-making

Individual: outward looking, ascetic, disciplined for hard work, able to process information

Institutions gain legitimacy through justification of reasonableness of the instituted rules → political rationality

Emotions of the individual are seen as too naive and chaotic to be reflected in governing practices of institutions
Looking behind the ubiquitous premise of evidence-based politics

Move from providing good knowledge- “evidence” (Sabatier 1998, Perl et al. 2018) toward an analysis of that knowledge

Public framing of expertise recalls dominant knowledge structures, gender hierarchies and cultural power (Cavaghan 2017, Harding 2008, Hawksworth 2012)

Emotions reveal socio-political conditions for the recognition of expertise by the society

How do citizens become legitimate actors of evidence-based politics?
Expertise in late modern societies

• Expertise as a legitimate and central means of the institutions of the late modern era

• Perennial disparity between expert authorities and individual experiences of citizen

• Expert discourses are presented as being on the side of progress, future and rationality

• Societal interdependence of expertise (Fischer 2009, Jasanoff 2005, Nowotny 2003, Strassheim 2015)
Emotions in scholarship on expertise

- as relating to **specific spheres of life**, mainly private or body-related matters **where the importance of compassion and empathy seem to be the expected property of the issue** (see examples in: Ahmed 2013, Jupp, Pykett, and Smith 2016, Orsini and Wiebe 2014, Paterson 2019)
- as **producing overreactions** (Maor 2012) and thus working against rationalizing structures of expertise
- as **urges motivating human action**, mobilizing citizen for collective action (Gould 2004, Jasper 2011) → This limits the relevance of emotions to areas such as participation or deliberation
- **viewed through actions** they initiate, prevent or facilitate (Gould 2009), **rather than through values and beliefs they reflect** in public controversies
Research on Emotions

• refers to the movement of the body or mind that is caused by a conscious or unconscious perception of an event / situation

• Emphasis on the cognitive component of emotions

• Strong focus on behavioral research (political behavior, nudging)

• Emotions as a part of the socialization process

• Emotions as a mirror of values

• Social historical and cultural context of emotions
Why we need sociological and cultural analysis of emotions

Pandemic is dominantly framed as an individual crisis in the hands of individuals

- It is on each of us to do something, to combat the crisis
- "Resilience" of the individual is presented as a predominantly individual ability
- Limited space for structural causes of emotions that accompany this crisis

Political instruments that deal with the pandemic are limited:

- Psychosocial states are presented as a "collateral damage"
- Focused on pathologies rather than on structural effects (or pathologies and structural causes are dealt with separately)
- No room for contradictory and ambivalent emotions (languishing, solitude, frustration)
Interpreting emotions

- WHAT EMOTIONS MEAN AND FOR WHOM
- EMOTIONS AS STRUCTURING OUR VALUES AND BELIEFS
- WHOSE EMOTIONS ARE LEGITIMATE/ WHOSE NOT? WHAT KIND OF EMOTIONS ARE LEGITIMATE/ WHAT NOT?
- THE ROLE OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF EMOTIONS IN POLICY MAKING
Emotions shape the context of the message in a positive or negative way.

Reveal rules-in-use transmitted through language.

'Unusually emotional', “very unusual” reflects a context; culturally/socially informed pattern – discourse on emotions.
Conflict over fathers at birth

In March 2020 Czechia banned fathers from the delivery rooms:

This resulted in a highly polarized debate:

• Fathers as epidemiological risk
• Fathers are protectors of emotional well-being of women
• Fathers are controllers/guardians against obstetric violence
• Fathers at birth as a mere fashion

*Let fathers to birth-giving!"
Media framing of Fathers at birth

Expectant mothers stare down the prospect of giving birth alone, as coronavirus upends hospitals

The Washington Post
Between Expertise and Emotions

Whose knowledge counts:
- parents
- Epidemiologists
- health care officials
- politicians
- NGOs
- Legal advocates

- Emotions initiate legitimacy for those whose emotions are endorsed publicly
- Endorsement of emotions by expertise is crucial
Framing of emotions in texts

Interpretive Research Design (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea 2013)

Text analysis
(Mainguena 1999, 2001 &2009)

- phonetic level
- morphology/lexicology level
- syntax level
- idiomatic/poetic level
- text coherence
- context (situational, sociopolitical, historical, cultural, time & space)
- comunication strategy
Framing of emotions

- Mothers ↔ health care staff
  - individualized needs ↔ pandemic risk
  - Resilience ↔ empathy

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**unusual stress** for mothers

_Hastily_ changed their plans because they will give birth alone

_Mommies_ will be helped by the care staff

_And like everything related to motherhood_, it caused a huge uproar.

... attacks of the League of Human Rights Advocates who _blackmail_ doctor ambulances
The Emotion fact-check

• Emotions are always on both sides of the conflict → ‘emotions’ or ‘emotional’ means emphasis of certain values and beliefs

• Emotions have always gender and ethnicity → what would be different if you change the person expressing emotions?

• Emotions are linked to culture → what would be different if you change the policy area/ the situation?

• Be aware of the emotion versus facts/knowledge/expertise/science binary → there are legitimizing facts on both sides of the conflict