

# HERTHA FIRNBERG PROGRAMME

## FINAL REPORT

Project number

Project title<sup>1</sup> \_\_\_\_\_: Negotiating Truth: Semmelweis, Discourse on Hand Hygiene and the Politics of Emotions

Project leader \_\_\_\_\_ Dr. Anna Durnová, Ph.D. \_\_\_\_\_

Project website<sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ [www.negotiating-truth.com](http://www.negotiating-truth.com) \_\_\_\_\_

---

<sup>1</sup> Short title in English and German language

<sup>2</sup> Projects that started after January 1, 2009 are encouraged to have a website.

# I. Summary for public relations work

## 1. Zusammenfassung für die Öffentlichkeitsarbeit

Wahrheit ist ein zentrales Instrument der Politik: sie teilt Akteure auf, sie schafft Täter und Opfer. Das Projekt definiert die Wahrheit neu; als eine Verhandlung von Emotionen und Fakten. Die Art und Weise, wie wir Faktenwissen im Gegensatz zu Emotionen behandeln, und wie wir über Emotionen in Wissenschaft und Politik sprechen, ist entscheidend dafür welche Akteure berechtigt sind an öffentlichen Debatten teilzunehmen, und die Wahrheit zu verhandeln. Die Rolle der Emotionen in der Wahrheitsproduktion wurde bisher von den politischen Analysen vernachlässigt, was auch dazu führte, dass Politologen vom Phänomen der "Post-Wahrheit" überrascht wurden. Post-Truth - der seit kurzem geprägte Begriff, der die Untergrabung der Wahrheit in westlichen Demokratien beschreibt - zeigt die Notwendigkeit einer solchen Analyse. Der Trend der Post-Wahrheit hat Wissenschaftler und die Zivilgesellschaft in einer öffentlichen Verteidigung der Wahrheit vereint: wissenschaftliche Zeitschriften lobten die Rationalität der Wissenschaft, WissenschaftlerInnen protestierten für Wahrheit und Fakten Check-Sites wurden schnell in der westlichen Medienwelt verbreitet.

Der Kampf um die Wahrheit könnte jedoch bereits verloren sein, und zwar durch das, was das Projekt als "*Binarität von Fakten und Emotionen*" bezeichnet. Die Binarität ist eine Gedankenkonstruktion, die Emotionen den Fakten gegenüberstellt. Sie wird zu einem mächtigen Werkzeug, um bestimmte Arten von Wissen und Argumenten zu privilegieren. Eine normative Betrachtung der Emotionen ist ein zentraler Teil davon. Die im Projekt durchgeführten Analysen erklären die Konsequenzen, die die Binarität für die Rolle der Wahrheit in modernen Demokratien hat. Obwohl Emotionen an der wissenschaftlichen Wissensproduktion teilhaben, werden sie durch die Neutralität der Wissenschaft verborgen.

Die historische Kontroverse um Ignaz Semmelweis bezüglich Händedesinfektion ist ein Beispiel dafür, wie Wahrheit entsteht. Seine Vermutung, die Desinfektion der Hände von Ärzten führe zu einer signifikanten Reduktion des Kindbettfiebers - einer fatalen und weitverbreiteten Erkrankung im 19. Jahrhundert - enthüllt einen politischen Moment der Wahrheit. Es zeigt, dass gesellschaftliche Stereotypen, Semmelweis' emotionales Verhalten und Machtspiele für die Kontroverse entscheidend waren. Seine Wahrheit war subversiv, weil jede wissenschaftliche Wahrheit subversiv ist, und sie war auch nicht neutral, weil jede wissenschaftliche Erkenntnis durch ihre Fakten die gesellschaftliche Debatte beeinflusst. Das Projekt verglich diese Ergebnisse mit der Analyse von Protesten von WissenschaftlerInnen gegen die Trump-Präsidentschaft im Jahr 2017. Auch die Analyse bestätigte die Rolle der Binarität. Die Ergebnisse laden deshalb ein, offen zu diskutieren, dass WissenschaftlerInnen durch ihre Entdeckungen Werte und Überzeugungen mitbilden und neu definieren.

## 2. Summary for public relations work

Truth is a central instrument of politics: it divides actors into advocates and opponents, it creates committers and victims. The project combines political science and science and technology studies to redefine truth as a negotiation of emotions and facts. The way our societies treat factual knowledge as opposed to emotions and the way we talk about emotions in science and politics identify the range of actors, entitled to pronounce public concerns, and to negotiate truth.

Emotions' role in truth production was neglected by the political analyses so far, which had the effect that political scientists were surprised by the phenomenon of "post-truth". Post-truth - the recently coined term to describe raging against expertise and undermining of truth in western democracies - shows the need for a deeper understanding of how truth gets legitimized in politics. The trend of post-truth has united scientists and civil society in a public defence of truth: scientific journals praised the rationality of science, scientists held protests to defend truth and fact-checker sites spread across the western media world rapidly.

However, this battle on truth may already have been lost to what the project calls a '*binary of facts and emotions*'. This binary is a thought construction that treats emotions as ultimately opposed to facts. The binary becomes a powerful tool to privilege some types of knowledge and some types of arguments. Specific way of referring to emotions in public debates is a substantive part of it. The analyses done in the project explain the consequences this binary has for the role of truth in modern democracies because they show how emotions operate inside scientific knowledge but get covered through the alleged neutrality of science in order to get legitimized in modern politics.

The famous historical controversy around Ignaz Semmelweis over the duty of hand disinfection is one example of how truth comes to being. Ignaz Semmelweis' assumption that the disinfection of the hands of physicians leads to a significant reduction of childbirth fever - a fatal and widespread disease in the 19th century among mothers - reveals a political moment of truth. It shows that societal stereotypes, Semmelweis' emotional behaviour and power games were decisive for the controversy. His truth was subversive because every scientific truth is subversive, and it was also partisan because every scientific finding takes side by bringing facts in the debate. The project compared these findings against the analysis of scientists' protests against the Trump presidency during 2017 that were discussing truth and its neutrality. The analysis uncovers that while 'truth' gets legitimized through the alleged neutrality of science, this neutrality is in fact created by a binary of factual knowledge and emotions. The project thus extends its findings to a general societal debate on a necessity to reflect on the values and beliefs of civil society scientists create and redefine through their discoveries.

## **II. Brief project report**

### **1. Report on research work**

#### **1.1 *Information on the development of the research project***

The project aimed at studying truth as a central instrument of politics building on the scholarship of poststructuralist political theory and science and technology studies (STS). While there has been an extensive discussion on the role of truth in politics in these fields, the role of emotion in truth production that has been neglected so far, which is the gap the project has filled. Most importantly, there has not been any work done in connecting the scholarship in political theory with the works in STS. Yet, as the results show, this connection is fundamental in understanding the truth production and the role of emotions for the legitimacy of modern democracies.

To provide a conceptual link with the STS, the project collected and analysed the historical and biographical material on Ignaz Semmelweis - the 19<sup>th</sup> century obstetrician raising a controversy over the duty of hand disinfection as a measure against childbed fever.

The analysis of Semmelweis case was directed toward two specific aims. The first aim was to analyse political aspects of the historical controversy over the origins of childbed fever and the 'scientifically true' measures against it. The second aim of the project was to extend the analysis to a range of contemporary cases that demonstrate well the interconnectedness of truth, emotions and knowledge. The underlying assumption has been that it was not Semmelweis' personal character and his confrontational way of arguing that made him fail but that each truth enters the scene by being uncomfortable and subversive. This has opened investigation of the way truth production is embedded in societal dynamics in diverse scientific controversies.

The project concluded by actualizing the Semmelweis case by an analysis of the post-truth condition, abundantly discussed by researchers in political science and sociology since 2016. The choice of this particular empirical example was not defined at the beginning of the project, because it did occur only in 2016. The proclamation of post-truth as the word of the year by the Oxford Dictionary in 2016 made the question of truth in public discourse even more immediate. Prominent scientific journals emphasized and praised the rationality of scientific inquiry, while raising urgent calls for action. This culminated in the organization of the first March for Science on 22 April 2017. A global event to support science, the march made apparent several sociopolitical contestations in the public role of science and truth for democracy that were discussed during preparation for the event. Since the PI was during this period a Visiting research Fellow at Yale university and could follow all these discussions and participate them extensively, she decided to choose this example. Analysing and comparing scientists'

protests against the Trump presidency as they enrolled throughout 2017 offered the project a stage of current political discussion on the status of truth. The previous work done in the project on Semmelweis controversy further helped to mirror these discussions against some famous scientific controversies in modern medicine.

Through this rich set of data, the project could show how truth is negotiated in public discourse through the interplay between factual knowledge and emotions. The way western societies treat factual knowledge as opposed to emotions and the way we generally talk about emotions in science and politics evaluate the range of actors, entitled to pronounce public concerns, and to negotiate truth. The binary opposition between facts and emotions also explains how modern democracies landed in the post-truth condition; they did not pay attention to different emotions intervening in knowledge production, dissimulate them behind allegedly neutral expertise thereby allowing that emotions rise to assets of populist politics and raging against expertise.

### ***1.2 Most important results and brief description of their significance (main points)***

**The analysis of Semmelweis controversy has opened a new gateway to problematize scientific disputes in both political science and STS: as political sites, where emotions play crucial role.** Ignaz Semmelweis' assumption that disinfection of the hands of physicians leads to a significant reduction of childbirth fever reveals in fact a political moment of truth. Most importantly, the analysis of the discourses around Semmelweis has shown that while discourse on hand hygiene has become implicit in the current Western medical practice - hand hygiene is now a cornerstone of public health agendas and is implemented by state institutions as well as by international agencies - the Semmelweis case demonstrates that the veracity of his thesis has been established along emotions, societal stereotypes and power relations that have been as crucial for the discovery as the factual knowledge of his discovery.

**The project elaborated a 'policy analysis of emotions', both a conceptual and methodological tool to analyse politics.** This was based on a synthesis of the scholarship around discourse and knowledge, among them most importantly the work of Michel Foucault on discourse and the work of Gilles Deleuze on the multiplicity of meanings. Both Foucault and Deleuze conceive meaning-making through permanent oscillation between the subjective accounts of a meaning and its collective interpretation. These two dimensions are not in conflict but create meaning through their interdependence. Summarizing the work of both authors within the context of the current public policy research has enabled to conceptualize an interpretive analysis of emotions (see Durnová 2015b, cit.; Durnová et al 2016 and Durnová 2018b, cit.)

**The project conceptualized how to move the debate on emotions in social sciences away from what emotions are and toward what they mean and how it enhances the critical shape of analysis of emotions because it uncovers conflicts hidden behind the veil of allegedly neutral policy instruments.** The project used this concept beyond the specific example of health, such as alimony policy (see the publication Durnová and Hejzlarová, 2017, cit.) or the role of expertise and its legitimacy in policy process (see among others in: Durnova, Fischer, and Zittoun 2016 – cit.).

**The project's overarching aim is to show that we need to look at how truth is negotiated and gets legitimized as 'fact' or 'expertise' and how this is important to understand the post-truth trend.** (This is shown in the concluding single-authored monograph "understanding Emotions in postfactual politics", Edward Elgar 2019). If there have been some sporadic studies on the role of emotions in public policy, they have mostly touched upon emotions as surplus phenomena accompanying actual policy making. The aim of the project was to go beyond these studies. How we label emotions in discourses matters for the policy process, and this is important both for the academic debate as well for a general understanding of scientists' role in societal debates, especially in times of post-truth condition.

**1.3. Information on the execution of the project, use of available funds and (where appropriate) any changes to the original project plan relating to the following:**

■ The project's length was 36 person/months. ■  
■  
■

■ As foreseen by the character of the Hertha-Firnberg Project, the project was carried out by the principal investigator Anna Durnova. ■  
■  
■  
■

- The project used the usual equipment needed for social scientific project of this size. A printer and a laptop were purchased in the first year of the project: the project did not receive these items from the institution. Besides, a considerable part of the work of the project needed to be collected in libraries and archives in Vienna and elsewhere, and a number of scientific meetings and research exchanges were a substantial part of the project, so a laptop device was indispensable for the projects' success. A bibliographic scientific software (Papers) was purchased to organise the

collected works from the archives on Semmelweis. In the last year of the project a new laptop was bought because the other one broke after four years.

- The project used the funds for furthering international cooperation, and for communicating the work of the project in the field of public policy, political science, science and technology studies and sociology, mostly in the form of participation at the leading academic symposia (such as Annual Meetings of 4S/the Society of Social Study of Science, American Political Science Association, Political Studies Association, International Political Science Association, International Sociological Association and European Consortium for Political Research. Thank to these activities, the PI got a substantial feedback on the publication from the project, was identified by the publisher that proposed her a contract for a self-authored monograph from the project (in Press, release spring 2019), as well as received an offer to act as a member of the Scientific Advisory board of the international Review of Public Policy.
- In order to make most of these contacts and to acquire soft-skill in academic management, the PI used the funds for academic coaching, and last but not least for editorial coaching in order to advance her writing skills. The writing skills in English are substantially important for social scientific work aiming at presenting concepts and theories to be publishable in Anglo-Saxon academia.

■ The project changed its hosting institution in 2016. ■. On the one hand the project wanted to pursue its final aim to extend the project's findings to current technoscientific controversies and the interdisciplinary research group Techno-Science and Societal Transformation of the institute for Advanced Studies in Vienna has been identified as the ideal venue for this. ■

■

■

■

- The project had several collaborations ranging well beyond the scope of the project and presenting one of the crucial assets of the PI professional development, among them most importantly the collaboration with the Yale University Center for Cultural Sociology. The principal investigator (PI) spent a research stay at the site in 2017 (January – April) and was accorded the status of a Faculty Fellow. The research stay was substantially important for gathering the empirical material in the last phase of the project. The PI also collaborated closely with Sciences PO Paris, where she is in the procedure to receive her Venia by the end of 2018 (see details under personnel development).

## **2. Personnel development – Importance of the project for the research careers of those involved (including the project leader)**

- The principal investigator (PI) has become a major theorist of emotion in the area of public policy, opening up this line of investigation in Critical Policy Studies. She was part of the editorial collective publishing the first Handbook of Critical Policy Studies (Edward Elgar 2015) presenting a chapter on emotions, she has also now an article on this perspective in the open access journal Politics & Governance. She is also repeatedly invited to review emotion related manuscripts in high profile public policy journal outlets (such as Public Policy and Administration).
- The PI has been accepted in the Venia procedure at the Sciences PO Paris, the leading research institution for political science in Europe (venia defence scheduled for December 2018).



- The PI has nurtured international cooperation, among them with the Yale university Center for cultural Sociology, that has offered her a status of Faculty Fellow. Thanks to the interdisciplinary orientation of the project the principal investigator was invited to sociological as well as philosophical symposia abroad to give keynotes and invited lectures.
- Thanks to her research activities, the PI had received a number of offers for leadership and scientific governance among them Advisory College Member of International Public Policy Association (leading professional association of public policy) and the function of Director of Board of the Institute of International Relations in Prague.

## **3. Effects of the project beyond the scientific field**

The project findings have been demanded by health-related scientific audiences, interested in the legacy of Ignaz Semmelweis. Most importantly, the PI has been asked to prepare single authored monograph on Ignaz Semmelweis with the specific focus of the political aspects of the controversy (Durnová, A, in den Händen der Ärzte. Residenz 2015). Several interviews have been demanded on that occasion. A film has been made for his 200th anniversary and the PI was involved in this. There was a symposium for his 200th Birthday where the PI was invited on the plenary panel. The PI gave also several interviews on the topic in leading Austrian media outlets (Ö1, die Presse, Standard). A collaboration has been started with Josephinum, the historical collection of the Medical University of Vienna.

Beyond the scientific audience properly speaking, the PI has received numerous offers for editorial contributions in the media, invites for public debates and official diplomatic meetings in bilateral debates between Czech Republic and Austria and has been also invited to be a jury member for politics and society the Documentary Film Festival Jihlava.

#### **4. Other important aspects**

- **Most important appearances at international scientific symposia:**

American Political science Association Annual Meeting, Washington D.C., August 2014

Midwest Political Science Association Conference, Chicago, April 2017

World Congress of International Sociological Association, Toronto, July 2018

- **Organization of Section themes at leading international scientific symposia:**

General Conference of the European Consortium for Political Research (Bordeaux 2013, Glasgow 2014, Prague 2016 and Hamburg 2018)

- **Chair of the Scientific Programme for the International Conference of Interpretive Policy Analysis (Vienna July 2013 – 300 participants)**

#### **Invited Talks & Keynotes:**

- 4<sup>th</sup> October 2018: Truth and Emotions in the postfactual world. Keynote at the Philosophical Days, University of Hradec Králové, CZ
- 15<sup>th</sup> March 2018: Understanding emotions in the postfactual world, Invited Talk at the Sociological Evenings, Faculty of Social Science, Prague.
- 5<sup>th</sup> October 2017: Responsibility in a Leaderless World, Plenary Panel, at the [9<sup>th</sup> International Symposium: Responsibility in a Leaderless World](#), Czech Foreign Ministry, Prague
- 28<sup>th</sup> April 2017: Culture of Truth: Emotions in a Post-factual World, Yale University [CCS Spring Conference](#)
- 24<sup>th</sup> April 2017: Searching for Truth in Post-factual Times, [Yale University Policy Lab](#)
- 24<sup>th</sup> September 2015: Keynote Address, Hygiene- Fortbildungstage, Meeting of the Austrian Association of Health Care (ÖGKV) „Die gemeine Hand: Der Fall Semmelweis und die Entdeckung der Kontaktinfektion.“ (Semmelweis Case and the Emergence of the Contact Infection)
- 24<sup>th</sup> September 2015: Keynote Address, Hygiene- Fortbildungstage, Meeting of the Austrian Association of Health Care (ÖGKV) „Die gemeine Hand: Der Fall Semmelweis und die Entdeckung der Kontaktinfektion.“
- 6<sup>th</sup> June 2014: “Negotiating Truth: Semmelweis, Hand washing and the Politics of Emotions.” “Semmelweis Lecture”, Keynote Address at the Annual Conference of the Surgical Infection Society Europe.

### III. Attachments

(lists may be as long as required)

#### 1. Scholarly / scientific publications

##### 1.1 *Peer-reviewed publications / already published* (journals, monographs, anthologies, contributions to anthologies, proceedings, research data, etc.)

###### Monographs:

Durnová, A. *Understanding emotions in post-factual politics: negotiating truth*. Edward Elgar Publishing. [under contract – expected release June 2019]

###### Journal Articles

Durnová, A. (2019). Die öffentliche Aushandlung von Wahrheit am Beispiel vom „March for Science“, Was bedeutet Interpretieren? Interpretative Verfahren in der Politikforschung, *Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft (ZPol)* [under review].

Durnová, A. (2018). Understanding Emotions in Policy Studies through Foucault and Deleuze, *Politics & Governance*, 2018, Volume 6, Issue 4, Pages X–X, DOI: 10.17645/pag.v6i4.1528, in Press.

Durnová Anna and Hejzlarová Eva (2017). Framing policy designs through contradictory emotions: The case of Czech single mothers, *Public Policy and Administration*. Vol. 33 (4), pp. 409-427. [doi.org/10.1177/0952076717709524](https://doi.org/10.1177/0952076717709524), NOA

Durnová, Anna (2015). Between the Individual and the Collective: Understanding the Tensions of the Interpretive Inquiry. A Response to Boswell and Corbett. *Critical Policy Studies*, Vol. 9.2, pp. 241 - 246. [doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2015.1040256](https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2015.1040256), NOA

Durnová A. & Zittoun, Philippe (2013). Discursive Approaches to Public Policy, *French Review of Political Science*, 63(3-4), 85-93. Doi.org/10.3917/rfsp.633.0569, NOA

###### Book chapters

Durnová, A., Fischer, F. & P. Zittoun (2016): Discursive Approaches to Public Policy: Politics, Rethinking the role of Discourse, Argumentation and Deliberation In : Peters G., Zittoun P. (Eds.), *Contemporary approaches on Public Policy*, New York, Palgrave-McMillan. pp. 35 - 58., NOA

Durnová A. (2015), Lost in Translation: Expressing Emotions in Policy Deliberation. In: Fischer, F. , D. Torgerson, A. Durnová and M. Orsini (2015) (Eds.). *Handbook of Critical Policy Studies*. Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 222 - 239., NOA

Fischer, F., Torgerson, D., Durnová, A. & Orsini, M. (2015) Introduction to Critical Policy Studies. In: Fischer, F., Torgerson, D., Durnová, A., & Orsini, M. (Eds.). (2015). *Handbook of Critical Policy Studies*. Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 1- 24., NOA

### **Edited Special Issues:**

Durnová, A. & Zittoun, P. (2013) (Eds.): Les approches discursives des politiques publiques [Discursive approaches to Public Policy] *Revue Française de Science Politique*. Vol. 3 (August)/2013.

### **Edited Books:**

Fischer, F. , D. Torgerson, A. Durnová and M. Orsini (2015) (Eds.). *Handbook of Critical Policy Studies*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

**1.2 Non peer-reviewed publications / already published** (journals, monographs, anthologies, contributions to anthologies, research reports, working papers / preprints, proceedings, research data, etc.)

### **Monographs:**

Durnová, A. (2015) *In den Händen der Ärzte. Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis – Pionier der Handhygiene*. Wien: Residenzverlag., NOA

### **Editorials:**

Durnová, Anna & Paul Just (2014). Societies in Conflict: Public, Experts and Democracy. *Critical Policy Studies*, vol. 8.4., 375 - 378. [doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2014.957044](https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2014.957044), NOA

### **Online Proceedings:**

Durnová, A. (2015). "Negotiating Truth: Semmelweis and the role of Emotions in Public Policy", available online at: <http://policyandpoliticsblog.com/2015/06/25/negotiating-truth-semmelweis-and-the-role-of-emotions-in-public-policy/#more-2381>, OA

Durnová, A. (2014). "Negotiating Truth. Semmelweis, Discourse on Hand Hygiene and Politics of Emotions, available online at: [http://www.sis-e.org/downloads/SISE%202014%20Semmelweis%20Lecture\\_Negotiating%20Truth\\_Text.pdf](http://www.sis-e.org/downloads/SISE%202014%20Semmelweis%20Lecture_Negotiating%20Truth_Text.pdf), OA

### **Book reviews:**

„Iva Šmídová, Eva Šlesingerová, Lenka Slepíčková, Games of Life: Czech Reproductive Medicine, Sociological Perspectives, Masarykova univerzita, 2015“, *Sociální Studia/Social Studies*, 3/2016, OA

„Helga Nowotny: The Cunning of Uncertainty, Polity Press 2016“, *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review* 4/2016, pp. 610 - 613., OA

**Selected Op-Ed Contributions (total number of contributions > 90):**

Durnová, A., H. Hönigsmayer and J. Starkbaum (2018): Elga gehört den Bürgern – lasst sie mitreden! <https://derstandard.at/2000079118035/Elga-gehört-den-Bürgern-Lasst-sie-mitreden>, 4.5. 2018, OA

Durnová, A. (2016): Naděje na zdraví jako věc veřejná, [„Hope to be cured as a public cause“], *A2alarm*: [a2alarm.cz/2016/06/nadeje-na-zdravi-jako-vec-verejna/](http://a2alarm.cz/2016/06/nadeje-na-zdravi-jako-vec-verejna/) , 7.6.2016, OA

Durnová (2015): Osudová špína na rukou,[„The fatal dirt on the hands“] *Nový Prostor* 2015/ 452, [www.novyprostor.cz/clanky/452/osudova-spina-na-rukou.html](http://www.novyprostor.cz/clanky/452/osudova-spina-na-rukou.html), OA

Durnová, A. (2015): Lékaři bez hranic odpovědnosti [„Doctors without borders of responsibility“], *A2alarm*: [a2alarm.cz/2015/08/lekari-bez-hranic-odpovednosti/](http://a2alarm.cz/2015/08/lekari-bez-hranic-odpovednosti/), OA

Durnová, A. (2013) „Emotion steuert Wahrheit: Semmelweis’ Hygienestreit unter der Lupe der Politikwissenschaft.“, *ÖKZ (54JG) EXTRA: Hygiene* 2013, OA