PERITIA Newsletter #12 May 2023

With every ending, a new beginning...

After more than three years of research activities, the PERITIA project is finally drawing to a close. Under the stalwart leadership of **Maria Baghramian** and the invaluable guidance of the advisory board, team members and work package leaders produced output that comprises no fewer than 23 scientific publications, two podcast series, white papers, policy reports, and 12 newsletters. Additionally, the team, often in conjunction with local partners, held numerous conferences and events over the years – even during the pandemic, when lockdowns forced a transition into a digital format.

The project ended with a two-day event at the heart of the European Union in Brussels: '**Research Insights for European Policymaking**'. Read all about the event's highlights as well as reflections from principal investigators in our final newsletter.

PERITIA's Trustworthiness Toolkit

We are increasingly asked to rely on expert advice in many areas of our lives. But how do we know which experts to trust? How can we tell if the information they're sharing is reliable? Even within the science community, predatory journals can help spread pseudoscience and disinformation. Equally, the pressures of academia can compel researchers to produce hasty results that have not been fully subjected to scientific rigour. How do you determine the trustworthiness of someone who presents themselves as an expert?

Maria Baghramian, **Carlo Martini**, and **Tiffany Morisseau** have developed a **toolkit** that provides simple tests and guidance to "train" people to be able to better gauge the trustworthiness of experts. It's been designed to be accessible to everyone, regardless of their technical expertise, including secondary school students.

Read more

Policy Briefs and Briefing Notes by Principal Investigators

Although the PERITIA project is ending, the impacts of the research that has been generated within its framework shall endure. Not only will the published articles continue to be available on the PERITIA website, but the working papers, policy briefs and briefing notes will soon have a digital home there as well. Below are the papers that partially served as the basis of the Policy Roundtable at our closing event in Brussels, a preview of what can be expected in the coming weeks:

'**Measuring trust in social surveys**', a briefing note by **Kirstie Hewlett**, **James Wright** and **Bobby Duffy,** addresses the question of how to operationalise complex concepts such as trust and trustworthiness within survey instruments, informed by a detailed review of the measures used in six major cross-country surveys and related literature. '**Trends in Trust**', by **Kirstie Hewlett, Rebecca Benson, Bobby Duffy,** and **Paul Stoneman**, analyses patterns of trust levels on a national level within European countries. Other papers include Cathrine Holst's policy brief '**How can governments build trust in science?**' and the working paper '**Behavioural Science: Ethics, Expertise, and Systemic Risk**' by **Liam Delaney, Atrina Oraee** and **Jet Sanders**.

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Highlights from PERITIA's Closing Event 'Research Insights for European Policymaking'

It was in the InfoHub's sun-drenched meeting space that PERITIA researchers and experts exchanged with members of the EU community on how to design trustworthy and trusted policies and cultivate a climate of trust among the public. PERITIA Project Leader **Maria Baghramian** and **Svetla Tanova**, Coordinator of the European Science-Media Hub, kicked off the discussion with an overview of the project and an introduction of the keynote speakers. STOA Chair and MEP **Christian Ehler** delivered a virtual message that spoke to the importance of expertise in policymaking: "Evidence-informed policy is crucial for our trust-based democracy," he stated.

President of the International Science Council **Sir Peter Gluckman** took the floor next, beginning his keynote speech with an emphasis on the deterioration of the conditions of societal trust:

"Democracy only works if you have trust. Trust between citizens. Trust from citizens to institutions. Both are at risk. Social cohesion is at risk [...] Science is a crucial part of our society but why is the trust in science at risk?"

Reflecting on various crises we are now facing, including rampant mental health issues and climate change, that render the rectification of trust even more urgent, he called on both policymakers and the science community to take mutual steps to re-establish trust in science:

"Science and the policy community need stronger interfaces [...] Multidisciplinarity and pluralistic evidence matters and most often works."

And yet, much of the responsibility lies with science actors themselves: "*Science* is based on principles. *Science systems* are culturally & contextually different. We must decolonize science systems, not science." With this in mind, Sir Peter further suggested, even as an admitted atheist, that religious leaders and scientists find ways of working together, as their domains are not necessarily irreconcilable, and could indeed bolster one another toward a broader acceptance and confident reliance by the public on science.

Watch the introductory remarks and the two keynotes here.

Participants were then treated to a **social simulation exercise** designed by the **Centre for Systems Solutions** (CRS). Social simulations are a suite of participatory tools developed by CRS that draw inspiration from "policy exercise" methods and roleplaying games. These immersive exercises engage a group of participants in collective exploration of a complex reality set in the near or distant future. Drawing upon research conducted by principal investigators **Maria Baghramian**, **Catherine Holst**, **Kirstie Hewlett**, and **Bobby Duffy**, participants were prompted to put theory into practice as they were confronted with societal problems they needed to solve: The Pangean Union was facing a protracted crisis of trust in climate science and expertise triggered by a whistleblower's revelations and allegations about a start-up funded by a large oil company. A crisis of trust was then brought on by the spread of misinformation across the Pangean Union and failed attempts by scientists to reassure the public. Participants were assigned roles – from populist politician to science adviser – and had to work together to stabilise the crisis through policy solutions.

Watch the simulation video here.

At the core of this event was the **Policy Roundtable**, moderated by **Toby Wardman** of SAPEA and featuring input from PERITIA's **Bobby Duffy**, **Liam Delaney**, **Cathrine Holst**, and **José van Dijck** in interchange with **David Mair** and **Katja Reppel** of the European Commission. Bobby Duffy kicked off the discussion with an overview of his briefing note, which specifies the potentials and limitations of social surveys in measuring trust. The basis of his analysis is a PERITIA survey of more than 12,000 people across seven European countries designed by The Policy Institute. This study was developed to assess public attitudes toward governments and institutions as well as their handling of the pandemic and climate change. The results are now fully accessible via PERITIA's Trust Hub, an interactive space for journalists, researchers and interested citizens.

The mic was then passed to Liam Delaney, who presented his policy brief on key lessons from policy responses to covid-19, namely, that the role of behavioural and social science in the policy process needs to be clarified and developed further. Next up was Cathrine Holst, who summarised her policy brief, 'How can governments build trust in science?' She outlined a 10-point plan that included steps from developing science advice mechanisms to committing to transparent communication. José van Dijck then expounded an interdisciplinary approach to the complex problem of governing public trust in platform societies, as she lays out in her article in the *European Journal of Communication*.

David Mair of the Joint Research Council spoke to the fact that science is a system that must be seen as such – he presented a project the JRC is working on in seven member states to help each of these seven countries better understand and improve the policy system in terms of its ecosystem approach to adapt to the needs of scientists. Katja Reppel, DG for Research and Innovation, invoked a very apt citation by Otto von Bismarck: "Trust is a delicate flower – once destroyed, it won't easily grow back."

Finally, it is important to recall, as Bobby Duffy reminded us, the data tell us that there is no new generalized crisis of trust across institutions and across countries: "Trust is going in different directions for different institutions in different countries," he stated. Rather, the polarization we are witnessing is as much about identity and tribal identities as it is about crises of trust. Thus, understanding where people start to grow – what their values are – becomes more important in a world in which your tribal identity is more related to your reaction to institutions and issues.

Watch the roundtable discussion [here](#).

The second day of the event featured presentations on the [Trustworthiness Toolkit](#) (see above), the project's series of [deliberative mini-publics](#), as well as the PERITIA podcast, '[The Trust Race](#)'.

The event – and project – then concluded with a passing of the baton to the experts of the future: the 12 winners (nine of whom were present) of the [Youth on Trust Awards](#), who had travelled to Brussels to take part in an awards ceremony.

In conjunction with the [Irish and International Young Philosopher Awards](#) at the [UCD Centre for Ethics in Public Life](#), PERITIA invited students between the ages of 13 to 18 from across Europe to share their views in a forum where their voices can be heard on the topic of trust in our social and political life. The project could take the form of an essay, podcast, film, blog post, short story or dialogue.

These remarkable students shared their own views on trust – most notably, how political trust in their elected representatives is still lacking for them and their peers. They look forward to the day that they might be "allowed" to enter that sphere and lead in such a way that honours the trust of their constituents. One could safely say that everyone in the room felt not only proud of these extraordinary young people but hopeful for the future as well.

Behind the Scenes

Reflections from PERITIA Principal Investigators

We asked PERITIA researchers to share with us what they learnt in the project and what contributions they are most proud of. **Carlo Martini** and **Bobby Duffy** shared their thoughts with us:

"It may be a cliché but I certainly learned how much I don't know about the complex relation between trust, policy and expertise, and how many factors are contributing to someone's trusting or distrusting a source of information. I also learned how complex a process it is to bring critical thinking in the digital world to the lay public.

I'm most proud of bringing social epistemology to experimental social sciences studying disinformation as well as using experimental tools to explore important questions in social epistemology. In short, a marriage of philosophy and empirical research."

"I learnt a huge amount, and the real delight of the project was the true interdisciplinary team, who actively shaped our work package. This way of working is often more theoretical than practice, but in this case, we couldn't have developed our survey without the expert input on hypotheses from different disciplines that we could test.

I am most proud of the work on cognitively testing the questionnaire (where we ask respondents to explain their thinking when answering key questions), which showed how vital exact wording is, and how often we may not be measuring what we think we're measuring! This is an underused technique, and it's great to showcase it through Peritia, and no doubt improved the study."

Reflections from Tracey Brown on Deliberative Mini-Publics

We spoke with Tracey Brown, director of Sense About Science about the significance of the citizen fora series and how this format lends itself particularly to both studying and cultivating public trust in experts and expertise. Tracey chaired the inaugural deliberative mini-public session in our Citizens' Fora series in London in November 2022.

"One of the great benefits of a workshop-style approach is that it actually really trains researchers. I think we underestimate the value of it – we think in terms of 'What do the participants get out of it?', which is often a lot. But actually, what did the experts get out of it? They begin to see the information that they bring in a context that they didn't have before. One of the key things for us in the workshop was seeing the way that people had to frame the same information in response to different types of questions. This was particularly the case when we broke people up into groups. One big thing I take from the experience is giving people the opportunity to question an expert in small groups, because the style of questioning was different in each group. Sometimes there were very common themes through the groups. The expert was then able to adjust to people coming from different places and experiences."

Read more

Stay tuned...

What's Next?

While the PERITIA project has come to its natural end, the truly impressive volume of research and outputs produced over the past three years will remain available on the website, including the Trust Hub and the Trustworthiness Toolkit. The PERITIA YouTube channel and twitter account will also continue to be accessible, where there are dozens of lectures, webinars, talks, and other events for your perusal.

We wish all the best to everyone involved in the project. Stay tuned for further developments regarding networks and research.

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