

WHIRL OF KNOWLEDGE: CULTURAL POPULISM IN POLARIZED EUROPEAN POLITICS AND SOCIETIES (WHIKNOW)

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WhiKnow's transgenerational and interdisciplinary team studies polarisation in contemporary societies, identifying a 'whirl of knowledge' that intertwines the media, politics and science. The project engages in theoretical and comparative empirical work, combining big data with qualitative and experimental research and media ethnography.

WhiKnow explores how social media hype brokers or meaning-makers and how these produce identifications, affects and emotions in polarisation. Politicians promote polarised forms of knowledge, scientists take part in talk shows and journalists step in as politicians. A neutrally intended scientific tweet can end up in a completely different constellation – trolled and contributing to political antagonism.

It appears that the affective spin of the 'Whirl of Knowledge' is fuelled by blending and intertwining knowledge, 'cultural populism', and polarising knowledge that generates new forms of subjectivity. Affect, belief and intimacy mould together media, politics and science, and previously distinct modes of knowledge in social media may lose their status as democracy's control mechanisms as societies polarise.

We study how societies change through relation and transmission of knowledge. The polarised societies in East Central Europe we study are relevant for the future of Europe: Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Czech Republic. Our partners engage us in other polarised or polarising societies: Belgium, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the UK.

Our research questions prompt our multi-level analysis:

- What topics polarise and cluster and by whom? WhiKnow first generates big data on social media to find out what polarises, where and how in spring 2019 (EP elections, Brexit) (WP1).
- How do media users and producers relate to knowledge, and how do people emotionally respond to and relate to knowledge? We study how emotions work in polarised contexts through the big data but also through ethnographic research, to investigate how sharing polarised knowledge takes place on the micro level (WP2). This is followed by experimental analysis of how polarised knowledge evokes emotions (WP3).
- How does polarising or softening knowledge generate new subjectivities? Theorising the intertwined media, politics and academia, and the role of emotions, humour, populism, transnationalism, and anti-intellectualism, we investigate multi-level knowledge production (WP4).

Through WhiKnow, we hope to rearticulate the theory of hegemony for an era of social media.



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