



WP 4d: Constructions of Risk and Anxiety in the Swedish 'Pig Scandal'

This study aims to explore how risk is constructed in news reports on the 2009 Swedish 'pig scandal' in order to illustrate how multiple constructions of risk turn meat consumption into an object of anxiety.



Methods:

The study draws on an analysis of 297 **newspaper articles** covering different aspects of the pig scandal. The articles were published in national and local Swedish newspapers from November 2009 to May 2010. A **narrative approach** was used to analyse how different constructions of risk developed in the media reports.

Findings:

- The news reports entail different narrations of the scandal where events are emplotted in different ways (assembled into a narrative with a plot). The process of emplotment involves the identification of what is at risk (the object at risk) and what constitutes a risk (the risk object). These objects are **reframed and redefined** in constructing different and contradicting risks.
- **Three competing narratives** were identified, constructing risk in different ways:
 - **Animal orientated narratives:** An animal rights organization exposed the deplorable living conditions of Swedish pigs (object at risk) previously hidden from consumers by farmers and the meat industry (risk object). Consumers were being misled by the industry's false codes of conduct and promises of self-examination.
 - **Farmer orientated narratives:** A group of extreme activists (risk object) started a campaign against the already struggling meat farmers (object at risk). Skilful activist PR misled consumers and legislators, making common treatment of livestock appear as animal neglect.
 - **Consumer orientated narratives:** An animal rights organization disclosed a number of cases of maltreatment (risk object) on Swedish pig farms. Consumers lost their trust (object at risk) in Swedish meat production and their trust had to be restored through efficient legislation and controls.
- By integrating contradictory constructions of risk, the news reports turned the pig scandal into an **anxiety event** where meat became a contested object and meat consumption and production became objects of anxiety.
- Turning meat consumption into an object of anxiety should not be understood as the work of the media alone. Rather it should be understood as the result of **media reproducing the narratives of different actors** holding different views of the scandal in parallel.
- The study emphasises the need to see risk and anxiety as **dynamic constructs made within a communication situation** rather than outside it, involving many actors rather than one single actor.



Key Publications:

Milne, R., Wenzler, J., Brembeck, H. and Brodin, M. (2011) Fraught Cuisine: Food Scares and the Modulation of Food Anxieties. *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 12 (2): 177-192.