

MUT
Programmgruppe
Mensch • Umwelt • Technik

Forschungszentrum Jülich
in der Helmholtz-Gemeinschaft

Public Communication of Climate Change

Conference “Challenges of climate change – global and local strategies to save the planet”, Warsaw, 19-20 April 2007

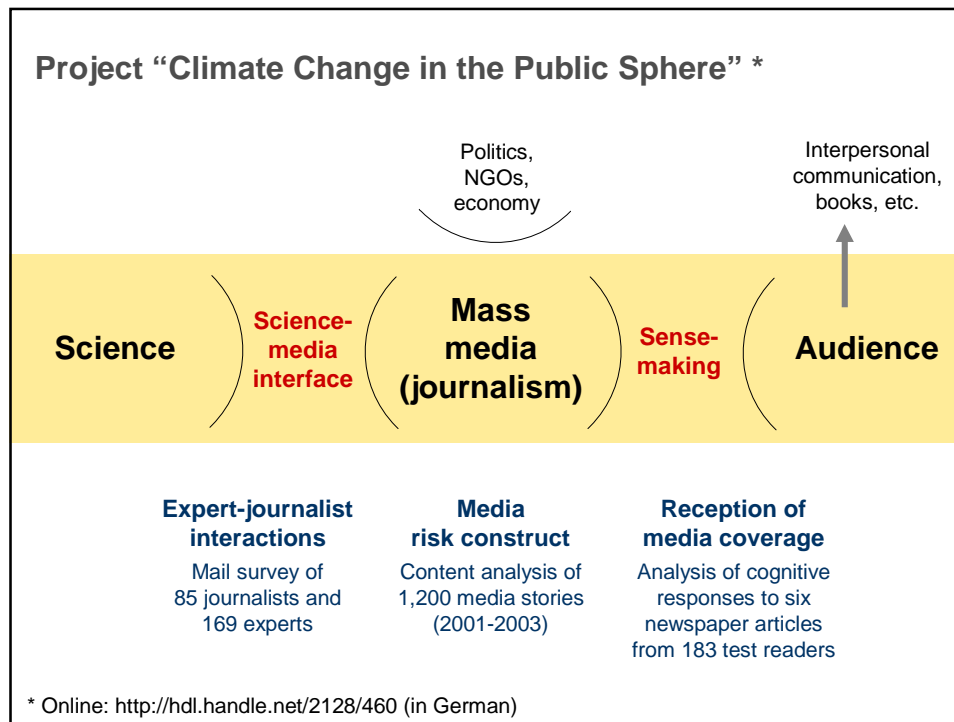
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Shocking world climate report

Our Planet Dies !

Now official: earth becomes hotter and hotter • More often heat waves and catastrophic weather • Sea level raises dramatically • **And responsible for everything is only mankind** (abbreviated)



Media “construct” of climate change in Germany

- **Risk:** Climate change is real and a serious threat
 - Melting ice shield, sea level rise, extreme weather events, decline in agricultural productivity
- **Causes:** Man-made activities (emission of greenhouse gases) / reduction of emissions effective
- **Coping:** Measures generally supported; focus on mitigation not adaptation; international climate conventions
- **Responsibility:** Mankind, industrialized countries and energy-wasting lifestyle
- **Trust:** Science evaluated positively / politics/administration: issue-related and local → positive

Science as the most important discourse actor

	Total %	Facts %	Judge- ments %	Demands %
Politics	36	24	35	51
Science	44	58	39	32
NGOs	8	4	13	8
Economy	5	5	6	6
Other	8	8	7	4
	100 (n=2,584)	100 (n=1,638)	100 (n=1,127)	100 (n=967)

Basis: 938 media stories dealing with global climate change

Source: Peters & Heinrichs 2005

Climate change real?

“[...] How strongly are you convinced that the predicted climate change will happen?”

	Scientists %	Journalists %	Population 2004 %
Completely convinced	52	28	34
Fairly convinced	38	65	51
Not very convinced	7	7	13
Not at all convinced	3	0	2
	100 (n=122)	100 (n=85)	100 (n=2,018)

Source: Peters & Heinrichs 2005

Mitigation possible?

“[...] How strongly are you convinced that climate change can be stopped by adequate measures?”

	Scientists %	Journalists %	Population 2002 %
Completely convinced	15 -	6	9 +
Fairly convinced	26	31	41
Not very convinced	42	61	44
Not at all convinced	17	3	6
	100 (n=122)	100 (n=85)	100 (n=2,361)

Source: Peters & Heinrichs 2005

Adaptation possible?

“[...] How strongly are you convinced that Germany can solve the problems caused by climate change?”

	Scientists %	Journalists %	Population 2006 %
Completely convinced	11 +	4	4 -
Fairly convinced	43	49	35
Not very convinced	34	40	52
Not at all convinced	12	7	10
	100 (n=122)	100 (n=85)	100 (n=2,034)

Source: Peters & Heinrichs 2005

Some principles of journalistic construction of relevance by selection and (re-)contextualization

- Journalism as “observation” not information transfer or translation (“media logic”)
- Focus on what is new and surprising
- Reference to the everyday world of recipients (e.g. weather events, political topics, everyday problems)
- Creation of cognitive and affective involvement (needs and threats, norms, suspense)
- “Story-telling” rather than plain description of facts
- Use of general “frames” well-known to the audience
 - e.g. “disease”, “breakdown”, “revenge”, “scandal”

Role of the media in coping with climate change

- Construction of a social reality as a common reference frame for different parts of society
- Production of scientific expertise
 - Research → problem solving
 - General theories → specific explanations
 - Scientific self-references → references to policy, everyday life and culture
 - Cautious statements → decisive statements
 - Description and causal analysis → evaluation and consequences for action

Behavioral changes by public education via the media?

- Large audiences: “agenda-setting” & “cultivation of beliefs about reality” well-accepted media effect theories
- German population has adopted the media construct of climate change as subjective knowledge / resistance against counter-arguing
- Intentions for behavioral change
 - Pay higher prices for climate-friendly products 80 %
 - Prepared to change lifestyle 62 %
- Behavioral consequences to cope with climate change?
 - Threat not immediate and personal
 - Behavioral changes do not lead to personal advantages
 - Low affect because everybody is responsible
- Long-term behavioral effects in the general population depend on technical norms and economic incentives

Political effects of media: Potential for policy changes

- Political system responds to media constructs of reality (“medialization of politics”)
- Agenda setting
 - New risks challenge the legitimacy of current policies
 - Promising fields of political activity
 - Establishment of a new field of policy-making (climate policy)
- Political demands and actions are judged against the “media reality” – leading to differential public legitimacy
- Barriers to policy changes
 - Lobbying of interest groups profiting from the *status quo*
 - Global scale of problem requires international cooperation
 - Political risks of policies posing burdens on population
- Easy way out of the dilemma: symbolic politics?
- Required: careful monitoring of policy-implementation by NGOs, experts and the media