

Communicating the Climate

How to communicate scholarly findings on climate and weather in a controversial time

Rachel Carson Center, Munich, on 18 August 2017

This short workshop engages with the questions surrounding climate science communication, from a social science and humanities' perspective. The aim is to learn from each other how to communicate climate social science, and climate humanities, findings most effectively, and how to make this important work salient in the wider world. A corollary aim is the exchange of expertise between graduate students in different disciplines, and encouraging an honest reflection on their own preconceptions and aims (and each other's).

Rationale

Anthropogenic climate change, or *global warming*—as it was referred to before U.S. Republican spin doctor Frank Luntz had his say—, has been a dominant force on the global agenda for several decades (yet not so dominant as many might wish). Often, the first assumptions about anthropogenic climate change are that it concerns a physical process. The climate scientist has become a champion of the environmental movement, and in most countries there is a loud cry for 'more climate science.'

While the role of the climate scientist in the debate about anthropogenic climate change is a rather clear one—although there certainly are debates to what extent a scientist should be an activist—, the role of the scholar is rather murky. As decades of climate science have passed, what should have been obvious from the beginning has become increasingly prominent (and dire): tackling anthropogenic climate change was never going to be straightforward, and it was never purely a scientific, political, or economic question. These issues cut to the heart of what it means to be human, what should be the aim of society at large, what rights people in the (less-)developed world should have, how we experience weather, and how we make sense of climate. As Mike Hulme has stated "Climate is an idea that carries a much richer tradition of meaning than is captured by the unimaginative convention that defines climate as being 'the average course or condition of the weather at a place usually over a period of years as exhibited by temperature, wind velocity and precipitation' [which is often seen as the textbook definition, red]." (Hulme, 2009, 4). Additionally, there are important questions about the role of the history of climate and climate science, and its ability to communicate anthropogenic climate change. Does knowing more about the history of climate provide us with useful tools to communicate climate issues, or does it provide climate skeptics with more ammunition to claim that 'the climate is perpetually changing anyway'?

How to deal with anthropogenic climate change is an inherently human question, and if we want to reach a durable 'solution', it calls for a deep understanding of people's life worlds and imaginations. At the same time, it seems that many of the interpretive and social sciences have had, and still have, issues categorizing their response to climate change. What role is there to play, and how, for these academic disciplines. In this workshop, we will discuss these issues, and try find a voice for our little niches of academic research, for our conceptions of climate, and for our concerns about climate science.



Central Questions

The central question for this workshop revolves around the relevance of climate research from a social sciences and humanities perspective. How can scholars, and especially early-stage researchers, working on climate-related issues make their research as relevant as possible—beyond scholarly publications?

The following questions will be central to the workshop:

- How do we effectively communicate climate science, climate change, really any matter so vague and abstract as ‘climate’?
- How do we engage with the climate science from a humanities perspective? How do we navigate the (sometimes self-imposed) divide between the natural sciences and the humanities/social sciences?
- Above all, how can we communicate our work in such a way that it may actually make a difference?

Program

Friday, 18 August

08.30 - 09.00 - *Coffee/Tea ‘Registration’*

09.00 - 09.15 - *Introduction* (Katrin/Jeroen)

09.15 - 10.45 - *How to: Climate History?* (Dania)

How do we think and talk about climate reconstruction from documentary, instrumental, and proxy records? How can we make climate history useful for contemporary discussion: among historians, with your colleagues from the natural sciences, and the general public? What does climate history tell us about the nature of our climate knowledge? How can we use this knowledge?

10.45 - 11.00 - *Coffee break*

11.00 - 12.30 - *How to: Uncertainty and Unknowability in Climate Science?* (Christoph)

How do we accurately and fairly represent unknowability and uncertainty in climate science without catering to climate change denial? How do we deal with the construction and translation of knowledge without being vague? To what extent should we worry about unknowability, non-verifiability, and uncertainty when communicating climate science?

12.30 - 13.30 - *Lunch in the Reception Area of the Rachel Carson Center*

13.30 - 15.00 - *How to: Responsibility and Social Factors in the face of Climate Change?* (Helmuth)

How do we deal with cultural and cognitive factors of climate change acceptance? What is the role of the notion of responsibility for human action? How to deal with geographical and national responsibility? Do we need to talk justice and fairness?

15.00 - 15.30 - *Coffee Break*



15.30 - 17.00 - *How to: Perceptions and Representations in a Controversial Time?*

How can we communicate and visualize climate research effectively? How do we reach a broader audience? How do visualizations and representation (mis)inform and influence a broader audience? How do we engage with prominent perceptions and visualizations (be it good or bad)? What should the message be (hopeful/catastrophic)?

17.00 - 17.30 - *Wrap-Up Session*

18.00 - *Dinner at a Nearby Restaurant*

Saturday, 19 August (optional)

The conference room is reserved for further discussion. Participants can meet and gather on their own initiative to talk further and discuss possible inspiration/projects/etc. Katrin and Jeroen will also be present.

Workshop

This short workshop will be a full day, starting at 08:30 am on 18 August. During the day, food and drinks will be provided, as will some drinks at the end.

One potential aim of this workshop is to publish a working paper series in the [Perspectives](#)-series of the Rachel Carson Center. These open-access online and print journals have a wide reach, and typically publish a volume consisting of thematic pieces of 2000–3000 words each.

Invited Experts

Christoph Baumberger

Senior Research Assistant at the Environmental Philosophy Group at ETH Zurich, Switzerland

Dania Achermann

Postdoctoral Fellow in the group Shaping Cultures of Prediction: Knowledge, Authority, and the Construction of Climate Change at Aarhus University, Denmark

Grit Martinez

Senior Fellow and Coordinator Coastal and Marine studies at the Ecologic Institute Berlin, Associate Research Professor University of Maryland

Helmuth Trischler

Head of research at the Deutsches Museum, Munich, professor of modern history and the history of technology at LMU Munich (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität), and director (jointly with Prof. Dr. Christof Mauch) of the Rachel Carson Center



Participants

Saskia Brill

PhD-Candidate in Anthropology at LMU Munich

Vikas Lakhani

PhD-Candidate in Geography at LMU Munich

Eline Tabak

Prospective PhD-Candidate at LMU Munich and Macquarie University in Sydney

Rosemarie McMahon

PhD-Candidate in Climate Science at ETH Zurich

Ruhi Deol

PhD-Candidate in Geography at LMU Munich

Pollyanna Rhee

PhD-Candidate in History and Theory of Architecture at Columbia University in New York

Martin Bauch

Junior Research Group Leader at the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe in Leipzig

Dorothea Born

PhD-Candidate in Science and Technology Studies at University of Vienna

Vera Gebhardt

PhD-Candidate in Management/Behaviour & Change Management at the New University of Lisbon

Gustaf Johansson

PhD-Candidate in History at Uppsala University

Matthew Bender

Associate Professor of African History at the College of New Jersey

Raechel Lutz

PhD-Candidate in History at Rutgers University

Philipp Hüpkes

PhD-Candidate in Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Vechta

Lynda Walsh

Associate Professor of English at the University of Nevada, Reno

Emilie Schur

M.A. Geography Graduate University of Arizona (currently based in Munich)

Rapti Siriwardane-de Zoysa

Postdoctoral Researcher at the Leibniz Center for Tropical Marine Research in Bremen



Costs

The workshop is free of charge, including lunch and coffee breaks.

Please arrange your own transport to and from Munich (Munich is easily reached through its international airport, or well-connected long-distance train station). Please also organize your own accommodation, however, if you need assistance, please talk to the conveners and they will try to assist you in your search.

Contact

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact:

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Bibliography

- Hulme, Mike. *Why We Disagree About Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

