

Climate Change as Cultural War? An Ethnography of the Climate Debate

Werner Krauß

In this project, I write about climate change as a digital practice. Knowledge about climate change and the resulting climate politics are deeply influenced by climate science and their digital models. The same is true for societal communication about climate change, which is congruous with the rise of social media. Ever since the “Climategate” scandal, when hackers published emails of climate scientists at East Anglia university, climate blogs have played an important role in the climate debate. The division of the climate blogosphere into irreconcilable camps and their opposing narratives has deeply influenced the political dynamics of the climate debate in and outside of climate science, with blogs of climate skeptics on the one side and the advocates of catastrophic climate change on the other. Today, the critique of climate politics and the negation of effects of climate change are hallmarks of populist parties in the US and Europe. Obviously, the global climate debate has turned into a culture war, where questions of globalization, national identity, and senses of belonging are at stake.

My project is based on participant observation as an avid blogger and as one of the editors of the interdisciplinary climate blog “*Die Klimazwiebel*” (climate onion), which existed from 2009 to 2016. During this time, we—two climate scientists, two sociologists, and I—critically covered ongoing events in the climate debate and invited skeptics to comment upon our posts. Today, this blog serves as a huge archive of the decisive years of the climate debate. The focus on the role and use of digital media technologies opens up new perspectives on the climate debate and its political implications, on group formation, and the dynamic of narratives about climate change. German skeptics searched for a long time for a political affiliation, which many of them finally found in the right-wing party AfD. In a self-reflective way, I will write about the discussion with skeptics, but also about the tensions between science and the humanities. In these blog discussions, uncertainty became one of the key terms; uncertainty about what counts as a scientific fact and about the role of social media, but also about what it means to live with global climate change.