

DEMAND 01
TELL THE TRUTH
// RESEARCH SYNTHESIS AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

English: Government must tell the truth by declaring a climate and ecological emergency, working with other institutions to communicate the urgency for change.

Dutch: „**Wees eerlijk** over de klimaatcrisis en de ecologische ramp die ons voortbestaan bedreigen. Maak mensen bewust van de noodzaak voor grootschalige verandering.“

TELL THE TRUTH

Why the government?

The Netherlands finds itself on a major crossroads, where large systemic changes have to be implemented to both mitigate and prepare for the climate crisis. By ratifying the Paris agreement and by implementing the *Klimaatwet* in 2019 (Eerste Kamer 2019), the Dutch government has shown its good intentions. However, even though the Paris Agreement and the *Klimaatwet* are steps in the right direction, these frameworks still function within a capitalist system. Therefore, the root causes of environmental degradation and fossil fuel extraction, such as uninhibited economic growth, are not addressed. In both scenarios, capitalism is not questioned. Rather, it is treated as the solution to the climate crisis, as an opportunity for economic growth. The social aspects of these policies are not being questioned, let alone solved. Because the *Klimaatwet* does not question the system we have in place right now, it does not question the inequalities and disproportionate burdens on lower income groups and future generations that come with it.

Research has shown that people paradoxically see governments as responsible for environmental problems, yet have little faith that they will tackle those problems (Nerlich et al. 2010). This is partially because general audiences are quite sensitive to the partiality of expert-political information and environmental debate (Burgess & Harrison 1998). This paradox can be changed if the government would start to tell the truth about the impact the climate crisis will have on our livelihoods. Susan Moser (2010) writes about the importance of the role of the messenger in climate change communication. Messengers give a seal of approval to information that an audience might otherwise have a hard time to trust or believe (Moser 2010). Therefore, when the message of the climate crisis is being told by a democratically elected government, the urgency of the problem might be understood by a wider audience.

In addition to the credibility of the government as the messenger of the truth about climate change, it is also important to look at who is included in the audience of the Dutch government. The audience includes people who live in the Netherlands, who can change their individual and community behaviours to fight the climate crisis. But the Dutch government's scope reaches farther than Dutch citizens; the government also conveys the message to businesses, the fossil fuel industry, and other countries. By telling the truth, the government can be held accountable for its past actions regarding the climate crisis. But, more importantly, the government itself can be spurred to take real action. Furthermore, with the government taking a clear stance on the climate

crisis, the platform of climate change deniers who are disproportionately included in debates and media outings might get increasingly smaller.

What is the truth of climate change?

Climate change is a wicked problem that manifests itself in many smaller local problems. Therefore, the truth of climate change is different for different parts of the world, for different communities, for different species, and for different generations. While the facts about climate change can be presented as numbers and statistics, those will affect everyone differently when they are translated into a local weather disaster, flood, or pollution hazard. Environmental injustice occurs when one group, usually a minority or low-income community is disproportionately burdened by an environmental problem (Holifield 2001). Similarly, climate injustice affects minorities and low-income communities when it comes to larger climate change issues. Climate justice and environmental justice partially overlap, because most climate change issues are also environmental problems. However, not all environmental problems are related to climate change, think of local air pollution causing asthma (Schlosberg & Collins 2014).

When it comes to burdens of environmental problems and climate change, the Netherlands is a relatively privileged country compared to the rest of the world. The Netherlands is a wealthy country and there is a high standard of living (Wikipedia 2019). However, within the Netherlands there are communities that do not have the same access to these high standards of living. Whether that is because they live on a natural gas field, whether they have a low income, or both. The climate crisis will affect us all in different ways. But the bottom line is that it **will** affect us all.

Even though the Netherlands is a wealthy country, money can only do so much when it comes to global sea level rise. A considerable part of the country either lies below sea level or is vulnerable to flooding from rivers. While water management and sea level rise adaptation are one of the biggest Dutch knowledge export products (Kimmelman 2017), at some point the sea might rise too much to keep the Netherlands dry. This reality brings us to why part of the truth about climate change is stressing the mindset of urgency we need now.

A matter of urgency

The truth about the climate emergency cannot be told without stressing the urgency of the matter. According to the United Nations Inter Governmental Panel of Climate Change (IPCC), there are only 12 years left before we cross the 1.5 C threshold (IPCC 2018). A 1.5 degrees Celsius increase in global temperature was the limit that was agreed upon in the Paris agreement. The reason this limit was picked is because the margins of error and the risks of extreme weather events become significantly bigger. Additionally, it might trigger specific non-reversible positive feedback loops.

This is an urgent crisis. The Klimaatwet does not stress these risks too much, nor does the government talk about it a lot. The energy transition is framed as an obligation we have to stay

competitive with other countries, rather than to save our lives. The Klimaatwet uses 2030 and 2050 as reference years (Klimaatakkoord 2019), in which 2050 is the year in which the Dutch economy has to be carbon neutral. This is 31 years from now, not twelve. If we want to stay under the 1.5 C threshold, we need to act faster. And for that, we need the government to tackle climate change like the crisis it is.

In their research, Nerlich et al. (2010) write how a fear appeal in the form of emergency language should only be effectively used if a credible way out of the problem is also presented. The credible and realistic solutions to the climate crisis have been around for a long time, but the incentive to invest in them has never been made clear as the government has never dared to use more alarming language when it comes to climate change.

Therefore, we need the Dutch government to tell the truth; state the facts, and use the language that is necessary to spur society as well as industry and themselves to action.

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Schlosberg, D. and Collins, L.B., 2014. From environmental to climate justice: climate change and the discourse of environmental justice. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 5(3), pp.359-374.

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ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Burgess, J., Harrison, C.M. and Filius, P., 1998. Environmental communication and the cultural politics of environmental citizenship. *Environment and planning A*, 30(8), pp.1445-1460.

Abstract

This paper presents a comparative analysis of how representatives from the public, private, and voluntary sectors of two cities [Nottingham (United Kingdom) and Eindhoven (The Netherlands)] responded to the challenge of communicating more effectively with citizens about issues of sustainability. The analysis is set in the context of literature about the need to widen participation in the determination of Local Agenda 21 policies, and the drive for more inclusionary forms of communication in planning and politics. Workshop members discussed the results of surveys and in-depth discussion groups with local residents which had revealed considerable scepticism and mistrust of environmental communications and environmental expertise. Three themes are explored. First, there is consensus in attributing responsibility for public alienation and resistance to environmental communications to the content and styles of media reporting. Second, there are contrasting discursive constructions of the 'public', which reflect different political cultures—with the Nottingham workshop supporting a strategy to share power and knowledge more widely than hitherto, whereas the Eindhoven strategy proposed greater rigour, clarity, and authority from the local state. Third, responding to evidence of public resistance to calls for more sustainable practices, workshop participants in both cities focused on what institutions themselves can and should do to progress environmental goals. Workshop participants in both countries acknowledged the urgent need for public, private, and voluntary sector organisations to match their own practices to their environmental rhetoric.

Notes

Hulme, M., 2008. The conquering of climate: discourses of fear and their dissolution. *Geographical Journal*, 174(1), pp.5-16.

Abstract

We are living in a climate of fear about our future climate. The language of the public discourse around global warming routinely uses a repertoire which includes words such as 'catastrophe', 'terror', 'danger', 'extinction' and 'collapse'. To help make sense of this phenomenon the story of the complex relationships between climates and cultures in different times and in different places is in urgent need of telling. If we can understand from the past something of this complex interweaving of our ideas of climate with their physical and cultural settings we may be better placed to prepare for different configurations of this relationship in the future. This paper examines two earlier European

discourses of fear associated with climate – one from the early-modern era (climate as judgement) and one from the modern era (climate as pathology) – and traces the ways in which these discourses formed and dissolved within a specific cultural matrix. The contemporary discourse of fear about future climate change (climate as catastrophe) is summarised and some ways in which this discourse, too, might be dissolved are examined. Conventional attempts at conquering the climatic future all rely, implicitly or explicitly, upon ideas of control and mastery, whether of the planet, of global governance or of individual and collective behaviour. These attempts at ‘engineering’ future climate seem a degree utopian and brash. Understanding the cultural dimensions of climate discourses offers a different way of thinking about how we navigate the climatic future. However our contemporary climatic fears have emerged – as linked, for example, to neoliberal globalism, to ecological modernisation and the emergence of a risk society, or to a deeper instinctive human anxiety about the future – they will in the end be dissipated, re-configured or transformed as a function of cultural change.

Moser, Susanne C., Dilling, Lisa. 2006. *Creating a Climate for Change: Communicating Climate Change and Facilitating Social Change*. Cambridge University Press.

Notes

This is a book that is a more extended version of Moser’s paper from 2010, even though it was published a few years earlier. The book consists of a series of papers written by different scientists. Might be useful for further in-depth understanding of topics of communication.

Moser, Susanne C. 2010. „Communicating climate change: history, challenges, process and future directions“. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 1, no. 1 (2010): 31-53.

http://danida.vnu.edu.vn/cpis/files/Papers_on_CC/CC/Communicating%20climate%20change%20history,%20challenges,%20process%20and%20future%20directions.pdf

abstract

Since anthropogenic climate change first emerged on the public agenda in the mid- to-late 1980s, public communication of climate change and—more recently—the question of how to communicate it most effectively have witnessed a steep rise. This paper synthesizes what is known, presumed, and still unknown about how to effectively communicate this problem. An introductory historical overview of climate change communication is followed by a discussion of the challenges that communicators face in trying to convey the issue (invisibility of causes, distant impacts, lack of immediacy and direct experience of the impacts, lack of gratification for taking mitigative actions, disbelief in human’s global influence, complexity and uncertainty, inadequate signals indicating the need for change, perceptual limits and self-interest). The core of the paper focuses on key aspects of the communication process (purpose and scope of the communication, audience, framing, messages, messengers, modes and channels of communication, and assessing the outcomes and effectiveness of a communication). These elements are placed in relationship to several contextual factors that affect the communication process. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research on climate change communication.

Notes

This paper is a literature review of climate change communication up until 2010. It mostly focuses on why climate change communication by climate scientists has been met with so much skepticism, and what can be done by scientists and communicators to get the urgency of the climate crisis across more effectively. The study mostly uses the USA as a context, thus heavily focuses on climate change deniers. Therefore the approach is not always as relevant.

Nerlich, B., Koteyko, N. and Brown, B., 2010. Theory and language of climate change communication. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 1(1), pp.97-110.

Abstract

Climate change communication has become a salient topic in science and society. It has grown to be something of a boom industry alongside more established 'communication enterprises', such as health communication, risk communication and science communication. This article situates the theory of climate change communication within theoretical developments in all three fields. It discusses the importance of and difficulties inherent in talking about climate change to different types of public using a various types of communication tools and strategies. It engages with the difficult issue of the relationship between climate change communication and behaviour change and it focuses in particular on the role of language (metaphors, words, strategies, frames and narratives) in conveying climate change issues to stakeholders. In the process, it attempts to provide an overview of emerging theories of climate change communication, theories that, quite recently, have begun to proliferate quite dramatically. We end with an assessment of how communication could be improved in light of the theories and practices discussed in this article.

Notes

Paradoxically, research suggests that people see governments as responsible for addressing environmental problems, yet have little faith that they will. A fear appeal (emergency language) should only be used if a credible way out of the problem is also presented.