

Connect for climate

Seminars on the contribution of social and human sciences to climate actions

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First webinar - 14/10/2020

Do people still care about climate change? Why careful public engagement on climate change is critical during and after the COVID-19 crisis

Dr Adam Corner, Climate Outreach

1. Key takeaways

- As climate change has started to hit home, Covid-19 has not dented public concern on the environmental urgency. But this high level of concern is only a starting point. The societal transformation needed to arrive at net zero requires a **social mandate** across the whole of society. The desire “to build back better” after Covid-19 is an opportunity to build this mandate.
- To get people on board to make the profound changes necessary, this concern has to solidify into **deep conviction and commitment** to action on all levels. People need to understand the reasons behind the changes they need to make. Only then can we create a shift in social norms that catalyses and underpins all other changes.
- In order to create this public engagement, we have to put the values that guide people’s views and behaviour at the heart of the narrative on climate change. Effective communication is not about the big numbers, but about **starting from peoples’ values** and building a story upwards, so people become part of that story and shape it.
- Speaking to people’s values also ensures ownership of this issue through different political traditions. People on the right e.g. respond to values such as pragmatism, avoiding wastefulness. Global injustice frames are real, but for many people on the right this frame is less engaging. However, the goal must be to **find common currency across political differences**. Audience understanding is about commonality, not difference.
- People misperceive other people’s ideas on climate change, creating a social vacuum on the issue. **Climate conversation** can help shape the narrative around climate change and the pathways to change. This dialogue can deliver a sense of **collective efficacy**, of knowing we can make a difference if we act together, thereby walking the fine line between fear and hope. Covid-19 has shown that we are able to act together to avoid a shared risk but also that only with public engagement can systemic changes be successful.
- **Possible approaches:** join the dots with health risks of climate change; capitalize on growing support for the green recovery by making good on the promised benefits with credible and inclusive pathways, especially for ‘forgotten’ groups; tell the human story of this transition, in words and images.

2. Resources

- Communicating climate change during the Covid-19 crisis:
<https://climateoutreach.org/reports/communicating-climate-during-covid-19/>
- Climate outreach : www.climateoutreach.org
- Report Alberta Narratives Project:
<https://climateoutreach.org/reports/alberta-narratives-project-core-narratives/>
- [Webinar on YouTube](#)

3. Takeaways from the questions

- **Impact of Covid crisis on public concern**
Corner: None so far, but the economic problems are only just starting to be felt. The mental model of what climate change is has changed though. It is no longer abstract and distant; it has become part of lived experience.
- **Hope vs fear: *What are the stories of hope that cut through? What about the use of apocalyptic frames?***
Corner: There is no reason to downplay the seriousness, we have to be honest about the risks and the threats. Hope comes from credible messaging and actions, from the idea of efficacy, the belief that actions make a difference.
- **Imagining the new: *People don't want to go back to normal, but they can't imagine what the new is?***
Corner: We need to ground where we go next in our shared vision and climate dialogue is critical for that. Listening is a massive part of this: hearing what people have to say and starting from those concerns, aspirations, dreams, wishes, thereby shaping something together that lasts beyond the shifting political winds.
- **Getting 'big offenders' on board: *Middle class and rich people have the biggest carbon footprint. How can we reach out to them, they tend to think that they will lose what they like most?***
Corner: Carbon footprint varies enormously, not just between countries but also within countries. The high carbon habits of the wealthy minority are not showing signs of changing yet, even though they have the social capital and ability to engage differently. Still climate change engagement has to involve everyone, by showing those with a low carbon footprint – often because of socio-economic reasons – that they benefit from these changes.
- **Trust in institutions: *Will governments which were perceived to have handled the pandemic better receive stronger social mandates for climate action? How do municipalities that aren't considered 'trusted messengers' but are creating policies to impact behaviour, frame communications?***
Corner: Covid is a good illustration of dealing with a shared risk that does right by people and shares responsibility. Trust has to be built. Many cities have had a push to pedestrianize streets during lockdown. Where this quickly becomes unstuck is where the process isn't seen to be fair and open, people need to be brought into it.

- **Individual vs. collective:** *Have you see any messaging that effectively “joins the dots” between an individual’s action to reduce their carbon footprint and the comprehensive systemic changes? What about structural impediments to changes in individual behaviour?*

Corner: We need to focus on behavioural changes that matter. And for there to be a spill-over from one behaviour to another, people need to buy-in to the reasons behind them. But people also need to see that those individual changes are being matched by changes on a policy level, by showing people examples of practical systemic levels changes that can be a motivator and an impetus for individual changes. There are structural barriers to what people can do, but even if you remove those there are still psychological barriers to be addressed. It’s a jigsaw puzzle – tech, economic/financial changes, policy – but underneath and alongside is the social dimension that unlocks the potential of all those pieces.

Second webinar - 19/11/2020

Motivating climate action

Dr Linda Steg, University of Groningen

1. Key takeaways

- Key to understanding what motivates people to act pro-environmentally are four values: hedonic and egoistic – focusing on narrow self-interest – and altruistic and biospheric values, focusing on collective interest. The more people prioritise **altruism and biospheric values**, the more likely they are to act pro-environmentally.
- Dominant strategies such as information and extrinsic motivation do not lead to behavioural changes (in the long run). Information does not automatically translate in behavioural change. And extrinsic motivation works well, but only for as long as the incentives continue.
- Sustainable behaviour is driven most effectively by **intrinsic motivation**, the willingness to bear some difficulty or cost because acting sustainably chimes in with one's biospheric values. Since people are motivated to act in accordance with how they view themselves (environmental self-identity), they will act sustainably.
- Another key motivator is the fact that it **feels good to act pro-environmentally**. Doing something meaningful voluntarily, contributing to the greater good gives a “warm glow” (cfr James Andreoni) and boosts people's self-concept, thereby encouraging them to continue this behaviour. Helpful climate action communication stresses good things people have already done.
- Moreover, **people are more likely to act sustainably when they see other people do so**. However, we tend to underestimate the extent to which others care. Communication on this point is useful. This not only applies to citizens, but also to companies and governments who can motivate the less motivated by leading by example.
- Governments and companies need to **remove the structural barriers** that make pro-environmental behaviour for intrinsically motivated people too difficult and create a context that fosters biospheric values.

2. Resources

- [Research by Dr. Linda Steg](#)
- Publication: [Elf, Isham & Gatersleben \(2020\) Above and beyond?](#)
- [Webinar on YouTube](#)

3. Takeaways from the questions

- **Does information matter?** *Is informing people less important for sustainable behaviour, with fake news out there?*
Steg: Information is mostly relevant when the key barrier to change is lack of information, i.e. when people do not associate meat consumption with climate change. Don't put all the energy on fighting climate scepticism, the number of people who are really sceptical is very low.
- **Nudging our way to change?** *Are "nudges" a way to facilitate pro-environmental behaviour?*
Steg: Nudges – giving people a gentle push in the right direction – might be effective if the gentle push is there all the time. But people then do it because they are nudged in that direction, not because they believe it to be right. If the nudge is no longer present, it is likely that people won't continue their change in behaviour.
- **Show, don't tell:** *Can co-benefits potentially motivate populations that currently have low motivation?*
Steg: Co-benefits are really important to emphasise. It is important to let people experience, through trial projects, what this world might look like, because research shows that when anticipating great changes people's initial idea is often too negative.
- **Value conflicts and individual responsibility:** *What about value conflicts? How easily are pro-environmental values overridden and how can we avoid this?*
Steg: The most important value for you, the one you most strongly endorse, is the one that affects your choices most strongly. But not always. People with strong biospheric values might not act accordingly in a situation where pro-environmental behaviour has a very high cost. Individual behavioural changes are not solely the responsibility of the individual. Organisations, governments, companies, they all have a major impact on the choices we have and the attractiveness of these choices; they have to make sure that changes are feasible and not too costly to act upon. Furthermore, it helps to ask people to explicitly commit to changes, they then are more likely to do so.
- **Watch out for guilt trips:** *What are the effects of emotions on pro-environmental behaviour?*
Steg: Our emotions have a strong influence on our preferences and our behaviour. My colleague in Switzerland, **Tobias Brosch**, studies this. If you anticipate feeling guilty about not acting pro-environmentally, then you are more likely to act pro-environmentally. Emotions are a strong driver because they signal what is important to you. That being said, you have to be careful with negative emotions because they can impact wellbeing.
- **Group effect:** *Does it make more sense to do campaigns promoting sustainable behaviour in groups, e.g. get neighbours to insulate their homes or install solar panels?*
Steg: Group approaches are very promising. We studied Buurkracht, a bottom-up initiative that aims to promote sustainable energy use. Even though people adhering to this initiative were already convinced of the importance of climate change, acting as member of a group had added value: it provided additional motivation and had as co-benefit the possibility to connect with other people.

Third webinar - 19/01/2021

How to encourage pro-environmental behaviour and overcome barriers to behaviour change

Dr. Siegfried Dewitte, KU Leuven

1. Key takeaways

- Changing people's behaviour is key to effective climate action. Pro-environmental values are established and endorsed, but pro-environmental behaviour is lagging. According to behavioural science two factors help explain the gap between intention and action: habit (with novelty acting as a counterpoint, allowing for new types of behaviour); and barriers due to lack of know how or conflicting goals. There is a difficult trade-off: acting in a values-consistent way means a loss of immediate personal benefits.
- Behavioural scientists are expected to deliver the keys to close the gap between intention and action. They are, however, falling short on what they offer. Effective climate action requires a programme for fundamental changes in behaviour with huge effects; behavioural science delivers fragments with relatively small and uncertain effects.
- Factors contributing to this delivery gap: effect sizes are small (i.e. nudges work reasonably well but the effects are limited; social proof works well in general but not with pro-environmental behaviour because that is minority behaviour); replicating effects and replicating in other labs or countries and beyond the lab are difficult, leading to uncertainty about which effects are robust; effect fades quickly; huge individual differences are overlooked.
- The climate emergency requires bold, ambitious, out of the box thinking for everyone, including behavioural scientists. They need to really understand behavioural change by testing the reliability of prior findings and identifying solid effects; understanding the determinants of pro-environmental behaviour and barriers and habits; identifying individual differences; designing valid and reliable measurement techniques; designing behavioural change techniques; testing and finetuning, again and again, in the lab and the real world.

2. Resources

- Hummel, D., & Maedche, A. (2019). How effective is nudging? A quantitative review on the effect sizes and limits of empirical nudging studies. *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics*, 80, 47-58. [Downloadable from the KBF-website](#).
- [Webinar on YouTube](#)

3. Takeaways from the questions

- **Marketing to the rescue: Marketing could be used to achieve 'change acceleration'. It has been a driver of overconsumption but could also be part of the toolkit for pro-environmental behaviour.**

SD: Social marketing is not the ultimate solution, but the business approach is useful. Changing people's behaviour is like selling a product. You need to convince the consumer, in this case the

citizen, that you have a good product. Business acknowledges barriers and thinks of benefits to counter them. But social marketing has the same problem with replicability. Business has a goal, and the whole team works towards that goal. We should do that as a society.

- **Rules: choose wisely. Given the limited effectiveness of these behavioural interventions, should we not opt for imposing rules? Are we too afraid of imposing rules? Rules can create resistance. But they can be very effective.**

SD: If people do not collectively believe that what you ask of them is for the better, if they have not yet started to move in the desired direction in sufficient numbers, imposing rules may be counterproductive. On the other hand, once there is a critical mass, things may shift very quickly. Just look at how seamlessly and quickly the smartphone has been introduced. We should look at that process and learn from it.

- **Too ambitious? Do you think our ambitions/expectations are unrealistic? A few percent effect in law enforcement or marketing is considered a success, so why not for certain nudge/behavioural interventions? And considering the urgency, should we not experiment in all directions, even if the outcomes are not optimal?**

SD: For a company an increase in market share of 2% is very good. But climate change is a different kind of problem. We cannot afford to work with such small increases. I agree that expectations and ambitions are very high, but necessarily so. What I propose is too ambitious for the current state of behavioural science but I learned from talking to businesses that you have to aim high. Let us shift more radically. It is analogous with the whole climate problem. Small climate actions that do not upend the system, will not help us reach the 2050 goals. Because the system is the barrier for real breakthroughs. This is a plea for less modesty.

- **Whole, not single: A key development these last few years in behavioural science is the understanding that we need to approach things from a holistic perspective. Creating a behavioural change toolbox i.e. via tools like behavioural mapping.**

SD: It is essential not to focus on one technique to change one type of behaviour, but to try to understand the broader picture and meaning. Currently we are lacking in good behavioural tools for this holistic approach, even though mapping may come up with good ways of looking at the problem. Traditionally, there is scepticism surrounding qualitative research, but I think in these initial stages we need to think more broadly to find new ways of changing behaviour. Urgency can have a strong catalysing effect. A lot of progress was made during the war because the war economy has the power to push people in a certain direction and helps to think about certain solutions. We need a more concerted research effort to join collectives to focus on the issue.

- **Enter stage: stories. Can storytelling be another one of these tools?**

SD: Behavioural scientists would say that stories are not science. But in individuals you sometimes observe big shifts in behaviour. There are certain phases in life when change comes fast. I think

we should focus on these changes and try to understand them. Books and stories can help understand why and how people change. When science is in trouble, side disciplines that are not well established or honoured take centre stage and become relevant to kickstart science that is stranded in the face of these challenges.

Fourth webinar - 11/02/2021

Mobilizing against climate change. When research in human and social sciences strengthens scientific research on climate

Thierry Libaert, Earth & Life Institute UCL, member of the European Social and Economic Committee

1. Key takeaways

- Climate change is an important – albeit fluctuating – concern, but it is perceived as not here, not now and not ours. Moreover, what we say is important is not reflected in what we do, our inaction partially fuelled by uncertainty over which choices really make a difference. The hope that the younger generation will take up the mantle is not borne out by polling on climate change awareness and action in this age group.
- Blind spots further hamper climate change mobilisation. Advertising is a case in point. Advertising's rationale is inciting people to buy. Its imagery suggests that consumption buys happiness. This clashes with the idea of sobriety required for an ecological transition. The clamour of advertising pushes out any other messaging, including that of climate change awareness. Advertising can be leveraged to promote ecological transition, but the sector overall refuses responsibility in this regard.
- Raising climate awareness is further obstructed by our own ambiguity in the face of risks. For a risk to invite action it needs to be immediate, we need to feel affected by it and to understand how it happens. Visualising causes and consequences of climate change however is difficult, despite the information overload. Loss of faith in others reduces people's willingness to make personal sacrifices for the greater good. There is a lack of credible embodiments of the fight against climate change. Proselytising celebrities whose lifestyle is seemingly at odds with environment friendly behaviour are doing more harm than good.
- What to do? Avoid fearmongering and pessimism, unless you can also offer hope and a how-to guide on how to act. Borrow techniques and strategies from other disciplines, such as behavioural marketing. Mind your choice of words, preferencing words that identify causes and responsibilities and give agency and urgency. Avoid generalised messaging. Reduce the psychological and territorial distance people feel with regards to climate change and connect with people through wording and imagery. Build a new narrative that can unite. The fight against climate change is technical, moralising, taxing, fear inducing. Find a narrative that defines CO2 reduction as a means for a better world (cleaner air, healthier food, a less stressful life) rather than an end in itself.

2. Resources

- [Webinar on YouTube](#)

PRESS

- [Le Figaro: Face aux antipub, les professionnels du secteur réagissent](#)
- [The Intercept: A message from the future, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#)
- [CRC Research – Climate summit](#)

BOOKS

- [Destruction et protection de la nature](#), Roger Heim, 1952
- [Silent Spring](#), Rachel Carson, 1962
- [Avant que nature meure](#), Jean Dorst, 1965
- [Science and survival](#), Barry Commoner 1966
- [The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology](#), Barry Commoner, 1971
- [The New Good Life: Living Better Than Ever in an Age of Less](#), John Robbins, 2010
- [Le syndrome de l'autruche](#), George Marshall, 2017
- [Des vents porteurs, Comment mobiliser \(enfin\) pour la planète](#), Thierry Libaert, 2020

SCIENTIFIC ARTICLES

- **On the importance of emotional strength and the cultural dimension in awareness-raising: Influence of Narratives of Vision and Identity on Collective Behavior Change**, by Ilan Chabay; Larissa Koch; Grit Martinez; Geeske Scholz
- **On the visualisation of the consequences of climate change through the choice of colours represented:**
[\(PDF\) The Feeling of Red and Blue—A Constructive Critique of Color Mapping in Visual Climate Change Communication](#)
- **On the psychological aspects of the distance of the consequences of climate change:**
[Reducing, and bridging, the psychological distance of climate change](#)
- **On the role of the simple transmission of climate information:**
[Shifting public opinion on climate change: an empirical assessment of factors influencing concern over climate change in the U.S., 2002–2010](#)
- **On the role of fear in environmental communications:**
<https://www.x-mol.com/paper/6027565?recommendPaper=1298332972892786688>
- **Une synthèse de travaux sur la communication environnementale de Thierry Libaert:**
[Communication et environnement, le pacte impossible](#)
- **Les actes d'un colloque tenu à l'UCL en 2010 par Thierry Libaert:**
[Vol. 35: Communication d'organisation et environnement | Recherches en Communication](#)

3. Takeaways from the questions

- ***Blame the young? The youth climate movement has given rise to a critique of millennials' and GEN Z lifestyles fuelling the climate crisis. How to avoid a fracture between the younger and older generations? Would it be more useful to compare climate awareness of the younger generation three decades ago, two decades ago, a decade ago and now? This might reassure us that awareness inside this age group has grown?***

Thierry Libaert: This is not a criticism of the younger generations. Albeit a minority, there are active and vocal young people within the climate movement and as Margaret Mead and Serge Moscovici have shown in their work on minority influence, this can make a big difference.

- ***On advertising***

Thierry Libaert: Why is this one of the only economic sectors not to have a credible path to CO2 reduction? Why has this sector not engaged in working on changing representations and on its own role, not just in fuelling CO2 emissions but also in facilitating the transition to an environment friendly lifestyle? As part of my work for the French government I launched a proposal requiring the advertising sector to reserve 1% of its expenditure to support eco responsible advertising. It was not withheld.

- ***On the need for a WEO? How can environmental considerations take precedence when there is a WTO (World Trade Organization) but not a WEO (World Environment Organization) for binding commitments?***

Thierry Libaert: Outside my area of expertise, but by creating a WEO next to the WTO you run the risk of losing the jostle for dominance. Perhaps it is better to undermine the dominance of economic argumentation from within the WTO.

- ***On credible spokespeople: What about Greta Thunberg? Is it fair that she is expected to be 'holier than the Pope' to remain credible? Will her celebrity status hinder her messaging?***

Thierry Libaert: Greta Thunberg has helped to channel and enable the youth climate movement and that, for me, is a great success. The only time we had a full house at the ESEC was when she gave her speech there. I encourage anyone who fuels the debate on climate action and she has certainly done that.

Fifth webinar - 25/03/2021

From Science to Practice: how to design and implement solutions that encourage environmentally sustainable behaviours?

Dr. Julia Terlet, Behavioural Scientist

Fred Dorsimont, Managing Director

1. Key takeaways

- Changing behaviour is essential to a more sustainable world. To develop behavioural solutions, organisations need the right expertise and the right tools. In identifying those there is a useful complementarity between science and practice:
 - relating to climate change: there is a complementarity of the long-term perspective of science, and the shorter time perspective of businesses, policy makers, individuals. Climate change is both long-term and urgent, we need to strive for short-term improvement, without falling into implementalism, and consider long-term implications.
 - implementing solutions: practice provides context based on people's values and lived experiences and incorporates insights from different disciplines. Combining insights from both science and practice helps us understand what the best way is to modify people's behaviour, tailoring solutions to target audiences.
 - communicating solutions: climate scientists provide understanding of the broader mechanisms driving climate change but tend to focus on the big picture in statistical and abstract terms. Practitioners can translate the bigger picture into communication that relates to concrete experiences, resonates, motivates and opens up a dialogue.
- To combine all this into efficient interventions, Behaven uses two qualitative and scientifically robust modules: B=Map, appropriate for executional single-minded interventions in which a sufficient degree of motivation and ability combined with a prompt encourage behaviour; and the COM-B model, for complex behavioural change, in which change is the result of capability, opportunity and motivation.
- When tackling a project, choose the model and develop a methodology by:
 - defining: identify, qualify and specify the target behaviour that will drive the rest of the process. A behaviour system map can lay out different entry points to start influencing people's behaviour. Choose the behaviour people are most likely to do and that is most likely to have the greatest possible impact.
 - analysing: understanding the context around the behaviour you want to influence, the barriers and enablers. Combine an evidence review of what seems to work, what are driving forces, enablers and barriers, with own data and insights.
 - selecting the right interventions: contextual (people are influenced by how things are presented), internal (people are influenced by internal decision-making processes), social

- (people are influenced by others). Identify solutions that worked elsewhere or pick & choose from the catalogue of more generic interventions and adapt.
- executing the intervention: map the user journey, the points of influence and how they interact, and determine which interventions can best be used where in the journey to influence people's behaviour.
 - evaluate the ingredients for solution and impact. Criteria for evaluating the ingredients: Apease (Affordability, Practicability, Effectiveness, Acceptability, Side effects, Equity). Criteria for evaluating impact: input, output, uptake, outcomes.

2. Resources

- [Webinar on YouTube](#)
- Newsletter GoodMoves:
 - French: <https://goodmoves.substack.com/>
 - English : <https://behaven.substack.com/>
- Andersson, A. (2020). Is climate morality the answer? Preconditions affecting the motivation to decrease private car use. *Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment*, 78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trd.2019.11.027>
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3. Takeaways from the questions

- **Lasting impact? How do you know whether an intervention has short-term or long-term effects on people's behaviours?**
One of the challenges of behavioural science is that many interventions only study effects in a short period of time, they do not study what happens next. It takes time and resources to measure impact over longer periods of time.
- **Honey vs. stick. How effective is the use of the argument that people risk losing something if they do not change their behaviour?**
Very effective. This is loss aversion cognitive bias: individuals are more affected by loss than by gain. On the other hand, encouraging positive emotion can have a motivating effect that is as powerful as threats, with potentially greater impact.
- **It's all about the money Is money a useful way to change people's behaviour?**
Financial incentive can be a useful way to motivate behavioural change. However, it is context specific. Governments can use fines indefinitely to shape behaviour, but water or energy suppliers can only use incentives for a limited time. The problem is also that when encouraging pro-environmental behaviour, we want to encourage real motivation based on other values than economic values.
- **Individual vs. organisation You have mainly talked about individual behaviour change, but how to stimulate governments and industry to set the good example?**
If you think of government in terms of the people in the government, it is about influencing the right people so that they themselves will influence their peers to change practices. In terms of organisations, companies are under pressure to behave sustainably. This contributes to a wider culture, which in turn influences what people do and expect and incites organisations to respond to this.
- **We, the people What about the difference between individual versus collective behavioural change: does addressing groups and group efforts versus individuals, have an added value?**
Neighbourhoods, family, colleagues, peers: these are powerful tools, because people are social animals and mimic the behaviour of others. This can snowball and reach other networks of individuals. This also translates into language. Addressing people as ‘we’, as a community working towards a common goal, encourages people to take action more.

- ***Food, then ethics How to motivate people to change their behaviour when they fight for survival?***

In enacting behavioural change, people need the mental capacity to think of this. If people spend more time worrying about paying the bills or putting food on the table, that mental energy can't be allocated to other things. This needs to be taken into account when defining solutions. Part of the solution is then to make sure that it is simple and easy for people to go in the right direction and provide them with a certain level of support.

Sixth webinar - 20/05/2021

Climate controversies: why and how to map conflicting discourses?

Frederik De Roeck, postdoctoral researcher for Centre for Sustainable Development UGent,

Thomas Block, Director of the Centre for Sustainable Development UGent

1. Key takeaways

- We need to act on climate change. The question is how. There are no clear-cut solutions and therefore, on a societal level, this wicked problem disintegrates into climate controversies, dictated by specific assumptions, world views, interests, fact, and values.
- Discourse analysis is a useful tool to deal with this complexity. It helps 1) to understand controversies by analysing who claims to hold the truth and why; 2) to identify those whose discourse dominates debate and influences social change; 3) to understand how truths are (re)produced through discourse; 4) to stimulate democratic debate by paying attention to all relevant points of view including discourses deviating from dominant thinking.
- Discourse analysis is not about finding the truth. There are different truths, depending on the perspective, assumptions, values, and scope.
- With regards to sustainable development and transition pathways we mapped three dimensions in discourse: the storylines of each discourse (diagnosis, strategies, solutions); the world view (fundamental assumptions); the roles played by the different actors (who acts? whose interests are served?).
- We identified three major meta discourses: business as usual (sustainability within the existing political and economic structures through technological innovation); the reformist model (sustainability through tweaks of the existing structures, with a stronger guiding and regulating government and a reliance on technology); the transformative approach (a complete overhaul of the dominant structures).
- Although basic arguments differ, there is more congruence at the level of world view and normative positioning. These similarities can be starting points for a more inclusive communication.
- Discourse analysis helps to identify one's own blind spots and see the positions of others more clearly. It helps to identify constructive arguments that broaden and strengthen the societal debate on how to act on climate change, and the arguments trying to slow down or derail the debate by depoliticising the problem at hand or devaluing other positions, thereby narrowing the scope of the debate.

2 Resources

- [Video on YouTube](#)

3 Takeaways from the questions

- **Social media** in this discourse analysis?
Social media were not used as a data source as such, only when the pathway of data led us there. There is a particular way in which arguments are played out on social media, and a particular way in which people react. How does that affect the quality of the democratic debate?
- **Fast vs slow:** *The nuanced approach of discourse analysis generally slows down the debate. At the same time, the urgency of the climate crisis requires an acceleration of transitions. What is the interplay between these positions?*
We need to move fast and accelerate. The debate has shifted from asking if climate change is real or not to how to rethink the whole of society. Discourse analysis helps to identify possible solutions. Despite the need to move fast, you cannot skip steps when debating where we are going as a society. Speed can be an argument used in certain discourses to keep you from looking behind the arguments in a policy debate and answering critical questions which are of value to the societal debate and choices.
- **Citizens' individual views?** *Do you think you would find other discourses if you would focus on citizens' ideas in data collection, for example through focus groups or interviews?*
Discourses are always based on what people read, but their position in focus groups might be more informed by personal experiences and motivations. The interplay between political arguments and experiences is an interesting angle for future research.
- **What now?** *Could you elaborate on the potential, concrete use that the knowledge produced in your study could have outside of academia?*
How to use this kind of discourse analysis in practice is a huge challenge. An important element is to bring the actors to see that their discourse is not neutral. It helps to understand the logic of other actors. We are thinking aloud about what to do with the controversies we have already mapped (Is it still ok to fly? Meat or no meat? Hydrogen: key to a sustainable future?) within educational practices or within the media.
- **Cacophony vs. common narrative:** *All those discourses lead to a cacophony, resulting in inaction i.e. the 'business as usual' that many decisionmakers want. Why not propose a common narrative to a just transition?*
Discourse analysis helps to uncover the politics of these things. How are actors 'selling' solutions? Where are the coalitions? In terms of arriving at a common narrative, our idea that discourse may differ on the level of basic argumentation but may overlap to a certain extent on the level of world views, can be the start of a common narrative. It can break down walls in terms of polarisation and make sure that actors who seemingly disagree find a starting point for a discussion that brings them closer together. The politics of these transitions cannot be skipped.

Seventh webinar - 14/10/2021

Climate change, nationalism and the state: a realist approach -

Dr. Anatol Lieven, senior research fellow on Russia and Europe at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft

Respondents:

- **Heather Grabbe**, Director, Open Society European Policy Institute
- **Annika Hedberg**, Head of Sustainable Prosperity for Europe Programme, European Policy Centre

1. Key takeaways

- The dire threat that climate change poses to humanity in general and to individual countries, is recognised formally but is not prioritised by security and political elites. The focus is on the threat posed by Russia and China, whereas so many of these perceived threats are irrelevant through the prism of climate change.
- The real danger to our western democracies stems from climate change and its indirect effects, i.e., economic chaos and our reaction to mass migration due to climate change upheaval and state collapse. We need to strengthen our democracies more widely and, in the process, mobilise sufficient elite and mass democratic support for radical action against climate change.
- One answer is the new green deal, combining radical action to reduce emissions with measures of social solidarity, job creation and green re-industrialisation. Regardless of this outcome, we're in for a bumpy ride, requiring real sacrifice from today's generations to ward off the dangers of extreme climate change. Mobilising patriotism can help, as this attachment to an existing nation drives people's concern for the future of this nation, even after they have died. This also bridges the current generational gap in the struggle against climate change.
- This is not to devalue international agreements, cooperation and movements. But it is extremely unlikely that major players will be willing to relinquish power over radical action to an international institution, so there needs to be a way to get nation states to act. Nationalism is here, how can we point it in a better direction? Mobilising patriotism and civic nationalism focuses the attention of people and elites on the specific threat of climate change to their states and countries.

2. Resources

- Book: Dr. Anatol Lieven – [Climate Change and the Nation State](#), Allen Lane, updated paperback edition 2021
- [Video on YouTube](#)

3. Summary of debate Anatol Lieven, Annika Hedberg (European Policy Centre), Heather Grabbe (Open Society European Policy Institute)

- **Heather Grabbe:** Environmental degradation damages all systems and upends our understanding of security itself. If you could bring in the idea that security involves sustained and stable access to economic and social rights and habitable space for everybody, then territorial national security becomes less relevant. A systemic approach to ecological security is needed, that is not fragmented along national or regional borders, because it does not stop at borders. When nationalism defines security policy in terms of us vs. them however, of protection against foreigners and foreign threats, it reinforces a mindset of insecurity and fear about material deprivation that lowers people's openness to others and their sense of solidarity globally. The nationalist frame we need is about belonging and heritage and preserving what we are proud of, about the freedoms we enjoy. The cost of inaction will be to deny future generations these freedoms. What is needed, is not the language of sacrifice, but a vision of a future better life in a carbon neutral or climate neutral economy and society.
- **Annika Hedberg:** Nation states are essential actors in the transition. There is a discrepancy however between the ambitions at the EU level and member state action. The biggest driver for action should be self interest, recognizing that it is in a country's national interest to find effective ways to prevent, mitigate and adapt to climate change within its own borders and beyond. The current rhetoric does not stress enough the environmental, social, economic and security benefits of action and the cost of inaction. Why not change the narrative to a positive one, which recognises that we are in a race to the top for better solutions and better lives within the boundaries that the planet has given us? It takes more than nation states however to make this happen. Many changes are already driven by communities, businesses, cities, despite national governments. The EU can provide guidance, coordination, when nation states are slow to act, and the EU targets and policy framework can also provide incentives for action.
- **Anatol Lieven:** The task must be to convince elites and people that climate change really is a threat, and that protecting people in their countries also means helping countries elsewhere to mitigate and adapt or fear the consequences of inaction. Threat perception is a prime mover of human effort. I agree that we must focus on an end state of a zero-carbon green economy, a green new deal and social solidarity, but I fear that without using the language of sacrifice we will play into the hands of the opposing camp who will exaggerate the cost and use it as an argument against radical action.