Cite this paper as:
Carvalho, A. (2010) 'Media(ted) discourses and climate change: a focus on political subjectivity and (dis)engagement', *WIREs Climate Change* 1 (2): 172-179.

Article type: Opinion

Media(ted) discourses and climate change: a focus on political subjectivity and (dis)engagement

Anabela Carvalho

Keywords

Media, climate change, citizen, engagement, political subjectivity

Abstract

Research has shown that the media are the main source of information and the main factor shaping people's awareness and concern in relation to climate change and therefore have an important role in setting the public agenda. As a key forum for the production, reproduction and transformation of the meaning of public issues, the media influence understandings of risks, responsibilities, as well as of the functioning of democratic politics. This article argues that the media also matter to citizens' perception of their (potential) political agency or their political subjectivity. Media representations construct particular 'subject positions' for individuals and cultivate dispositions to action or inaction. The article discusses the importance of citizens' political engagement with climate change and points out some aspects of media(ted) discourses that may constrain the perceived possibilities of participation in the politics of climate change. While engagement with climate change has multiple dimensions and a number of barriers have been identified through empirical studies, this article offers a critique of the role of the media in political engagement with the problem and suggests avenues for future research.

The media are both important arenas and important agents in the production, reproduction and transformation of the meanings of social issues. The particular discourses that they amplify strongly affect the social construction of problems and of 'authorized voices'. Therefore, media(ted) discourses play key roles in social life as they are both conditions of intelligibility of the world and conditions of possibility of action upon it [1] .

Research has shown that the media have an important influence over people's perceptions of the 'distant' and unobtrusive issue of climate change [2, 3, 4]. Access to scientific information, political arguments and even ethical debates on this matter depends on the media(ted) discourses citizens' consume. Media coverage has been a key factor in raising levels of awareness and concern in the last decade or so [5]. Representations of the problem in the media are also likely to have influenced citizens' understanding of both the risks associated to climate change and the responsibilities in addressing the problem. Moreover, the social credibility and social authority of different social actors, their claims and arguments, are also largely defined by discursive exchanges taking place in the media [6, 7].

There are complex and dynamic connections between social practices and mediated textual practices. The processes of production and consumption of media discourse can be usefully understood as a series of cultural circuits where both encoding and decoding (i.e. how interpretations of the world are built into and read from signs) interact and co-evolve with political, economic and regulatory frameworks, and where the 'public' and 'private' spheres[i] intersect [8] Personal meaning-making draws both on media(ted) discourses and on lived experiences and social relations.

Political possibilities are conditioned by discursive constructions that are dominant (or felt as such) in a particular historical-cultural context. At a more fundamental level, so is the perception of one's own (potential) political roles and capacity. This article examines the relation between citizens' discursively constructed political subjectivity and the possibilities of participation in the politics of climate change. While engagement with climate change has multiple dimensions and a number of barriers have been identified through empirical studies [9], this article offers a critique of the role of the media in political engagement with the problem and suggests avenues for future research.

The case for political engagement on climate change

There can hardly be an issue more eminently political than climate change. It depends on decisions regarding collective matters, such as transport and energy, and the choices that are made have crucial implications for all living individuals, as well as unborn ones, both within and beyond national borders. Crucially, climate change also broadens the political field insofar as it transforms realities previously perceived as private and a-political, such as car use, into contentious options of collective significance. The policy and regulatory transformations that are

needed to effectively address the problem are far-reaching and political systems are unlikely to put them in place without a sustained display of public support (if not demand) [10]. Moreover, appropriate responses to climate change require the reconciliation of a variety of value-informed claims and interests. The only arrangements that may be viable in the long run are those that accommodate a diversity of positions or, in other words, that are equitable and fair. The voices and arguments that get to be heard and that get to be incorporated in policy decisions are key for the future of climate change.

In the last two decades, a number of scholars have promoted a wider participation of the public in science-related debates and decisions as a source of increased legitimacy, a basis of accountability and a guarantee of social and ethical relevance [11, 12]. Studies of citizen juries, citizen advisory boards, consensus conferences and other mechanisms of public participation indicate that valuable insight can be gained from involving citizens in decision-making [13]. Nevertheless, those mechanisms have so far had a limited impact in political life. These (typically) top-down exercises have in some cases been criticized for remaining closed-off to citizens as many aspects of decision-making continue to be constructed as 'technical' and 'non-political' and because citizens' views have had little, if any, consequences on the expert/political bodies [14, 15]. Furthermore, despite official commitments to promoting public participation in responding to climate change, there is evidence that governments' understanding of citizen engagement is mainly instrumental and based on a narrow conception of participatory democracy [16].

While institutional spaces with citizen participation are important and there is ongoing interest in the design of new forums to integrate citizens, experts and various stakeholders [17], the idea of political participation that is adopted in this article overflows those formal arenas. The boundaries of 'the political' are here not delimited by institutionalized politics or government but stretch to include all forms of (discursive) action on collective problems taking place in public spaces[ii]. Such action can take the form of a demonstration, an article in a newspaper or an online petition, any of which may serve to critique a political option, mobilize others for change or otherwise challenge power structures. These forms of informal political participation and citizen mobilization can be an important factor in political decision-making and could influence national and international policies on climate change. Political engagement of citizens could not only force governments to act but also improve the quality of the decisions as well as their acceptability[iii].

There are multiple indications that citizen engagement with the politics of climate change is quite low [2, 10]. What objective and/or subjective conditions may explain this? A survey of over two thousand people recently conducted in the US by Yale and George Mason Universities provides some interesting cues into people's relation to climate change politics. One of the questions aimed to assess levels of political activism, conceptualized as the act of having 'written letters, emailed, or phoned government officials to urge them to take action to reduce global warming' in the previous year [Reference 18, p. 23]. 8% of respondents declared that they had

done so although with different frequencies (from once to 'many times'). People were also asked what 'reasons might prevent [them] from taking [those] actions'. Out of ten possible answers, 'I am not an activist' was the most chosen one (by 33% of respondents). This is a statement about a subjective condition: the main declared reason for not engaging in political action is one's perceived identity. It is also worth mentioning that 10% of the people chose the option 'I would feel uncomfortable', which may be viewed as a similar motivation. 22% chose the option 'It wouldn't make any difference if I did', a justification that suggests a sense of political powerlessness[iv].

Ockwell, Whitmarsh and O'Neill have recently examined the reasons for the public's divorce from climate politics. Amongst other aspects, they pointed out that Hansard's latest Audit of Political Engagement in the UK [19] indicated a 'lack of political self-efficacy (…): less than one third of people believe that "when people like me get involved in politics, they can really change the way the country is run."' [Reference 10, p. 318]

The data mentioned above provide a stark picture of people's sense of their (potential) political power and of the possibilities for civic action in democratic societies. The first survey suggests that this may be a central aspect of political disengagement in relation to climate change. Moreover, it hints at an identitary chasm in relation to civic politics. Evidently, identifying the reasons of these perceptions is a critical task for social research. This article postulates that it is worth looking at how those notions may be rooted in the symbolic environment in which current democratic politics is enacted and at the role of the media therein. In order to do so, it suggests that it may be productive to draw on – and create bridges between – a variety of theoretical traditions and research fields, from media and political sociology to postmarxist discourse theory.

Culture of citizenship in a mediated world

The relation between the media and participation in political life has been the subject of much contestation. Whereas some scholars have hailed the media, old and new, as forces of social mobilization, which generate political interest and an active citizenry [20, 21, 22] others have condemned them as the cause of lack of trust in politics, cynicism, political apathy, and alienation [23, 24, 25]. Empirical studies have given fodder to both the mobilization and the 'media malaise' theses. Some researchers have shown a positive correlation between media consumption and levels of political talk and participation [26, 27] and a positive effect of the internet in levels of political information and political participation [28, 29], as well as in the empowerment of marginalized groups [30]. Others have found evidence that television distances people from community life and promotes civic disengagement [31]; have claimed that the internet reproduces differences of power and participation [32]; and that it 'increasingly encourages the individual to look for private solutions to the problems of public nature which contributes to the understanding of citizenship not as a public but predominantly as a private affair.' [Reference 33, pp. 349]. Finally, some studies have concluded that attitudinal differences may be associated with

consumption of specific types of media content (e.g. news or entertainment on television) rather than with a medium as a whole [34].

Despite these ambiguities in research, it is undeniable that the media are the main arenas for citizens' understanding of political struggles in our times. The notion of 'mediated citizenship' [35] acknowledges the centrality of the media in contemporary public spheres and in the construction of notions of the 'citizen', their rights, their responsibilities and their space for political action. In a media-saturated environment, perceptions of distribution of power, of the role of individuals in democracy and of the effectiveness of civic action are a function of multiple discursive representations that can be accessed via television news, street billboards, blogs, radio talk shows or mass emails, amongst many other forms. Crucially, media(ted) discourses also influence people's view of their own position in the chessboard of politics and are also constitutive of the political self, cultivating dispositions to action or inaction.

Individual self-recognition as a (potential) political agent therefore relates to one's (perceived) symbolic standing. The 'political self' is understood here as an interpretive construct regarding one's own position in the political world; it is a crucial dimension of political subjectivity, the (mediated) experience of politics and associated views and beliefs. Drawing on Laclau and Mouffe [36], as well as Giddens [37], the view adopted in this article is that political subjectivity depends on 'subject positions' in a discursive structure but that there are also possibilities for action within that structure. It is produced in the context of particular discourses and a contingent set of social relations but it is never fully fixed. Therefore it is subject to change and can be transformed.

Media representations and political subjectivity

What aspects of the media's representations of the world may hinder, rather than promote, political engagement? In this part of the article, several problematic issues are outlined. Some concern specifically climate change but others are of a more general nature as people's identities and subjectivities are constructed and reconstructed within the whole (mediated) discursive field.

Representations of the public's political (in)capability

Research has shown that the public is often associated in the media with a less-then-rational approach to social issues. For instance, in their analysis of representations of citizens in television in the US and Britain, Lewis, Wahl-Jorgensen and Inthorn concluded that the predominant image is of a passive, reactive and self-interested public. 'There is a sense here that ordinary citizens are almost childlike: they have moods, experiences and emotions, but they are rarely seen making forays into a deliberative public sphere.' [Reference 38; pp. 160].

Polls feature frequently in the media and in political discourse as proxies of public opinion and are used for purposes of directing attention to an issue or position, legitimating a given policy or

promoting opposition towards a political choice. They are a powerful rhetorical device. Höppner has analysed representations of polls about climate change in British newspapers and suggested that the public has often been portrayed as denying of climate change, with apathetic and hypocritical attitudes towards the problem and as 'deficient in terms of rationality, reliability, authenticity, consistency, acceptance, and behaviour' [Reference 39, p. 14]. In some cases, interpretations of the actual questions that were asked and of the distributions of answers were clearly distorted in order to fit a particular value preference.

The media may often be reproducing official discourses regarding public participation. Based on the analysis of the UK Climate Change Programme, Höppner maintains that 'citizens are expected to engage by adopting the 'right attitude', by performing prescribed behaviours, and by consenting to governmental measures' [Reference 16, p. 1].

As political agents with positions, ideas and proposals for addressing climate change and other public matters, citizens have been largely left out of media(ted) discourses. These exclusionary constructions do not recognize citizens as worthy speakers on the substance of collective problems and do not cultivate a proactive political identity. New media, such as blogs and other types of websites, have enabled self- and hetero-representation of citizens in alternative ways and thereby contributed to diversify this picture [e.g. 40]. More empowering modes of implicating citizens in discourse are certainly also possible for the mainstream corporate media.

The 'media politics of dissent' [41]

There is no doubt that social movements have influenced discourses on environmental issues and others in the last few decades [42], and that the development of new and alternative (non-commercial and typically non-professional) media has significantly enhanced the possibilities of civic politics. The Global Justice Movement [43] and media projects like *Indymedia*, *The Nation* and *Democracy Now!* are good examples of how new media, particularly Internet-based ones, may be used to create framings of global issues that challenge the dominant discourses in the mainstream corporate media [44; 45]. Often interactive and linked to mobile technologies, these media can be critical in the enactment of resistance [46]. The recent appearance of a number of civic initiatives on climate change, such as Rising Tide, Oilwatch, Carbon Rationing Action Groups, Transition Towns, 350.org and others, suggests that there is scope for critical engagement in the global politics of climate change[v].

Greenpeace is the most media savvy of environmental groups and their communication strategies have garnered a significant visibility around the world. In some cases, this has produced successful outcomes for the organization [47]. How this has contributed to the public understanding of environmental problems and politics is less clear. However, research has long shown that the relation between social movements and the media can be antagonistic and that

the journalistic reconstruction of civic action often empties it of its political content [48]. Several studies have pointed out that challenges to corporate-led globalization are predominantly portrayed as akin to undesirable social disorder in the mainstream media [49, 50, 51]. The 'anti-globalization' movement typically gets a shallow and biasing representation where the 'violent protest' frame is dominant and there is little or no acknowledgement and analysis of the stances of the movement in relation to key issues like international trade, poverty or environmental change. Similarly, acts of environmental sabotage, designed to protect nature while not harming humans, have increasingly been presented in the news media as 'ecoterrorism' [52].

Cottle [41] has recently argued that the media politics of dissent may be changing not only because the current media ecology offers more opportunities for independent communication but also because some 'old media' may occasionally engage in the 'manufacture of dissent' [53] and produce more progressive interpretations of civic action. He also cited data from several polls suggesting a growing public support for demonstrations [Reference 41, p. 857]. Replacing a culture of conformity, which according to Ivie [54] stigmatizes difference and conflict, with a culture of dissent may require significant transformations beyond the media. Nonetheless, these are encouraging signs.

Political scales and citizen agency

A large part of mainstream media stories about climate change are set in the context of high-profile intergovernmental meetings and advance the notion that the global is the appropriate political space for action. A study of the volume of print media coverage at a series of key moments since 1990 in Portugal has shown that the peaks coincided with international summits; in contrast, key national events, such as the public presentation of the Portuguese Climate Change Plan in 2001 and the presentation of the Portuguese Plan of Allocation of Emissions Allowances in 2004, received little media attention. Content analysis and discourse analysis of articles has also shown a disproportional representation of international politics and that the media often (implicitly) constituted the global into the appropriate locus of action [55]. Similarly, Olausson [56] has maintained that mitigation was mainly represented as a transnational responsibility in Swedish media. Sampei and Aoyagi-Usui's [5] analysis of newspaper coverage in Japan made visible that most peaks coincided with high-status international summits (national events only achieved significant attention when they were associated with media-oriented campaigns).

While this can partly be expected given the relevance of international negotiations for the management of climate change, it can also be argued that the national and the local are the right levels to act. Yet, sustained analysis of the possibilities for local policy-making on climate change features only rarely in the mainstream media. Hence, while climate change may be represented as a tragic threat, debate on the climate impacts of a new road or a new housing development

does not necessarily take place in a meaningful way. There is an apparent disconnect between climate change and specific sources of greenhouse gas emissions and between the global and local scales.

It is likely that this has influenced perceptions and ideas about the scale of climate change. Multiple surveys show that people tend to rank climate change higher as a problem for the world than as a problem for their own country or region [57, 5]. Furthermore, by constructing climate change primarily as a global political issue these discourses construct citizen agency as minute. Citizens are likely to feel powerless to affect processes and decisions at the global level. Such a setting emphasizes the distance between ordinary citizens and decision-making and reinforces the image of climate politics as being reserved to the heads of the most powerful states. As the management of climate change is, in most mediated discourses, the realm of (scientific and political) elites citizens are constituted into spectators or bystanders[vi].

Perceptions of the politics of climate change and of one's roles therein are also inexorably intertwined with wider discourses on 'globalisation'. Policy-makers, international organisations and – most obviously – corporations have been representing the 'mobility' of capital and production across the world as 'natural' and 'inevitable' processes [58]. This construction of globalisation, which is left unquestioned by many of the mainstream media, omits responsibility for particular choices and leaves no scope for citizen participation and informed deliberation.

Processes of globalization are of course complex and have many faces. It can be argued that while globalization means that there is no centre of power to work as a focus of contestation and resistance, the development of information and communication technologies has greatly facilitated the constitution of transnational forms of civic organization. Scholars like Szerszynski [59, 60] and Beck [61] have suggested that the media may contribute to the development of global or cosmopolitan forms of citizenship. Significant impacts on the politics of climate change remain to be seen but the development of civic movements mentioned above may suggest that some transformation is under way.

Closing remarks

Ockwell, Whitmarsh and O'Neill have recently argued that fostering social demand for political regulation could be a useful strategy to respond to climate change but pointed out that various factors may inhibit it [10]. In a similar line, this article has brought citizens' political engagement with climate change to the fore and discussed the role of the media in relation to political subjectivity. The critical analysis that was done here is by no means exhaustive. Besides the three aspects that were emphasized, many other factors may constrain people's sense of political agency or willingness for political participation, including a widespread disillusion with democratic politics, media alarmism and the sheer magnitude of climate change in spatial and temporal terms. Moreover, as Shanahan and McComas [62] have maintained, the wider media(ted) culture permanently appeals to values like 'progress' and materialism, contribute to maintaining the

status quo and dissuade audiences that they can or should play a role in solving environmental problems.

The main conclusion of this article is that it is worth investigating the roles of the media in the processes of political (dis)engagement in relation to climate change, and doing so in light of diverse theoretical contributions. Future research should focus on the role of new and alternative media (such as multimodal websites, videocasts and 'social media' like Facebook) in the empowerment and performance of resistance in climate change-related movements. It should analyse the communicative spaces where new forms of political subjectivity may be developing. It should probe into new varieties of 'collective political subjectivity'[vii], which are likely to be multi-scalar and flexible [63]. And it should continue to scrutinize the politics of recognition of civic agents by the mainstream media and implications for climate change.

Notes

Please note that all endnotes were placed automatically at the end of this document.

References

[1] Fairclough, N Media discourse 1995. Edward Arnold, London, 214 pp.

[2] Cabecinhas R, Lázaro A, Carvalho A Media uses and social representations of climate change. Pp 170-189 in Carvalho A ed. Communicating Climate Change: Discourses, Mediations and Perceptions 2008. Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Universidade do Minho, Braga, 200 pp. E-book available from: http://www.lasics.uminho.pt/ojs/index.php/climate_change

[3] Corbett J, Durfee J Testing public (un)certainty of science: Media representations of global warming, Science Communication 2004; 26 (2): 129-151. DOI: 10.1177/1075547004270234

[4] Wilson K Mass media as sources of global warming knowledge Mass Communication Review 1995; 22 (1-2): 75-89.

[5] Sampei Y Aoyagi-Usui M Mass-media coverage, its influence on public awareness of climate-change issues, and implications for Japan's national campaign to reduce greenhouse gas emissions Global Environmental Change 2009; 19: 203-212. DOI:10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2008.10.005

[6] Boykoff M, Boykoff J Balance as bias: Global warming and the US prestige press Global Environmental Change 2004; 14: 125-136. DOI: 10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2003.10.001

[7] McCright A, Dunlap R Challenging global warming as a social problem: An analysis of the conservative movements counter-claims Social Problems 2000: 47 (4): 499-522.

[8] Carvalho A, Burgess J Cultural circuits of climate change in UK broadsheet newspapers, 1985-2003 Risk Analysis 2005; 25 (6): 1457-1469. DOI: 10.1111/j.1539-6924.2005.00692.x

[9] Lorenzoni I, Nicholson-Cole S, Whitmarsh L Barriers perceived to engaging with climate change among the UK public and their policy implications Global Environmental Change 2007; 17: 445-459.

[10] Ockwell D, Whitmarsh L, ONeill S Reorienting climate change communication for effective mitigation: Forcing people to be green or fostering grass-roots engagement? Science Communication 2009; 305-327. DOI: 10.1177/1075547008328969

[11] Beck U The risk society: Towards a new modernity 1992. Sage, Newbury Park, CA, 272 pp.

[12] Irwin A Citizen science: A study of people, expertise and sustainable development 1995. Routledge, London, 216 pp.

[13] Smith G, Wales C Citizens juries and deliberative democracy Political Studies 2000; 48 (1): 51-65. DOI: 10.1111/1467-9248.00250

[14] Powell MC, Colin M Meaningful citizen engagement in science and technology: What would it really take? Science Communication 2008; 30: 126-136. DOI: 10.1177/1075547008320520

[15] Blok A Experts on public trial: On democratizing expertise through a Danish consensus conference. Public Understanding of Science 2007; 16 (2): 163-182. DOI: 10.1177/0963662507062469

[16] Höppner C What's the matter with public engagement in climate change? Disjunctions, tensions and blind spots in the UK (forthcoming)

[17] Burgess J, Clark J, Davies G, Eames M, Staley K, Stirling A, Williamson S Deliberative mapping: A novel analytic-deliberative methodology to support contested science-policy decisions Public Understanding of Science 2007; 16(3): 299-322. DOI: 10.1177/0963662507077510

[18] Yale Project on Climate Change and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication Climate change in the American mind: Americans climate change beliefs, attitudes, policy preferences, and actions 2009. Available from http://www.climatechangecommunication.org/images/files/Climate_Change_in_the_American_Mind.pdf

[19] Hansard Audit of political engagement 5 2008. Available from http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/parliament_and_government/archive/2008/03/27/audit5.aspx

[20] Dalton RJ Citizen politics in western democracies: Public opinion and political parties in the US, UK, Germany and France 1996 2nd rev ed. Chatham House, Chatham, NJ, 338 pp.

[21] Norris P A virtuous circle: Political communications in post-industrial democracies 2000. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 420 pp.

[22] Shane, PM Democracy online: the prospects for political renewal through the Internet Routledge, 2004, 279 pages

[23] Lippman, W Public opinion 1997 (1st ed. 1922). Free Press, New York, 288 pp.

[24] Entman RM Democracy without citizens: Media and the decay of American politics 1989. Oxford University Press, New York, 232 pp.

[25] Putnam RD Bowling alone. The collapse and revival of American community 2001. Simon & Schuster, New York, 541 pp.

[26] McLeod JM, Scheufele DA, Moy, P Community, communication, and participation: The role of mass media and interpersonal discussion in local political participation Political Communication 1999; 16: 315-336. DOI: 10.1080/105846099198659

[27] Moy P, Xenos M A, Hess V K Communication and citizenship: Mapping the political effects of infotainment Mass Communication and Society 2005; 8:2,111-131.DOI: 10.1207/s15327825mcs0802_3

[28] Shah D, Schmierbach M, Hawkins J, Espino R, Donavan J Nonrecursive models of Internet use and community engagement questioning whether time spent online erodes social capital Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly 2002; 79: 964-987.

[29] Tolbert C J, McNeal R S Unraveling the effects of the Internet on political participation? Political Research Quarterly 2003; 56: 175-185. DOI: 10.1177/106591290305600206

[30] Simone M CODEPINK alert: Mediated citizenship in the public sphere Social Semiotics 2006; 16(2): 345-364. DOI: 10.1080/10350330600664904.

[31] Putnam RD Bowling alone: America's declining social capital Journal of Democracy 1995; 6: 65-78.

[32] Zavestoski S, Shulman S, Schlosberg D Democracy and the environment on the internet: Electronic citizen participation in regulatory rulemaking Science, Technology, & Human Values 2006; 31(4): 383-408. DOI: 10.1177/0162243906287543

[33] Pajnik M Citizenship and mediated society Citizenship Studies 2005; 9(4): 349-367. DOI: 10.1080/13621020500211321

[34] Newton K Mass media effects: Mobilisation or media malaise? British Journal of Political Science 1999; 29: 577-600.

[35] Wahl-Jorgensen K Mediated citizenship(s): An introduction Social Semiotics 2006; 16 (2): 197-203. DOI: 10.1080/10350330600664763

[36] Laclau E, Mouffe C Hegemony and socialist strategy 1985. Verso, London, 208 pp.

[37] Giddens A The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration 1984. Polity Press, Cambridge, 402 pp.

[38] Lewis J, Wahl-Jorgensen K, Inthorn S Images of citizenship on television news: Constructing a passive public Journalism Studies 2004; 5 (2): 153-164. DOI: 10.1080/1461670042000211140

[39] Höppner C Manoeuvring the public: Opinion polls on climate change in the UK press (forthcoming)

[40] http://www.avaaz.org/

[41] Cottle S Reporting demonstrations: the changing media politics of dissent Media, Culture & Society 2008; 30(6): 853-872. DOI: 10.1177/0163443708096097

[42] Lipschutz R Global civil society and global environmental government: The politics of nature from place to planet 1996. State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 365 pp.

[43] Mertes T ed. A movement of movements: Is another world really possible? 2004. Verso, London and New York, 288 pp.

[44] Downing JDH Radical media: Rebellious communication and social movements 2000. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 440 pp.

[45] Atton C Alternative media 2002. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 172 pp.

[46] Atkinson J, Dougherty DS Alternative media and social justice movements: The development of a resistance performance paradigm of audience analysis Western Journal of Communication 2006; 70 (1): 64-88. DOI: 10.1080/10570310500506953

[47] Tsoukas H David and Goliath in the risk society: Making sense of the conflict between Shell and Greenpeace in the North Sea Organization 1999; 6(3): 499-528. DOI: 10.1177/135050849963007

[48] Gitlin T The whole world is watching. Mass media in the making and unmaking of the New Left 1980. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 240 pp.

[49] Juris J S Violence performed and imagined. Militant action, the black bloc and the mass media in Genoa Critique of Anthropology 2005; 25 (4): 413-432. DOI: 10.1177/0308275X05058657

[50] McFarlane T, Hay, I The battle for Seattle: Protest and popular geopolitics in The Australian newspaper Political Geography 2003; 22: 211-232. DOI:10.1016/S0962-6298(02)00090-2

[51] Opel A, Pompper D eds. Representing resistance: media, civil disobedience, and the global justice movement 2003. Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 296 pp.

[52] Wagner, T Reframing ecotage as ecoterrorism: news and the discourse of fear Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture 2008; 2(1): 25-39. DOI: 10.1080/17524030801945617

[53] Milne K Manufacturing dissent: Single-issue protest, the public and the press 2005. Demos, London, 77 pp.

[54] Ivie, RL Prologue to democratic dissent in America Javnost-The Public 2004; 11: 19-36.

[55] Carvalho A, Pereira E Communicating climate change in Portugal: A critical analysis of journalism and beyond. Pp 126-156 in Carvalho A ed. Communicating Climate Change: Discourses, Mediations and Perceptions 2008. Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Universidade do Minho, Braga, 200 pp. E-book available from: http://www.lasics.uminho.pt/ojs/index.php/climate_change

[56] Olausson U Global warming - global responsibility? Media frames of collective action and scientific certainty Public Understanding of Science 2009; Prepublished 21 January. DOI: 10.1177/0963662507081242.

[57] Cartea, PAM, Blanco MA La representación del cambio climático en la sociedad española: De la conciencia a la acción Segurydad y Medio Ambiente 2008; 109: 30-47.

[58] Fairclough N New Labour, new language? 2000. Routledge, London, 192 pp.

[59] Szerszynski, B, Toogood, M Global citizenship, the environment and the media. Pp. 218-228 in Allan, S, Adam, B, Carter, C eds Environmental risks and the media 2000. Routledge, London, 278 pp.

[60] Szerszynski, B, Urry, J Cultures of cosmopolitanism The Sociological Review 2002; 50(4): 461-481. DOI: 10.1111/1467-954X.00394

[61] Beck, U Cosmopolitan vision 2006. Polity Press, Cambridge, 216 pp.

[62] Shanahan J, McComas K Nature stories: Depictions of the environment and their effects 1999. Hampton Press, Cresskill, NJ, 198 pp.

[63] Haarstad H Collective political subjectivity and the problem of scale Contemporary Politics 2007; 13(1): 57-74. DOI: 10.1080/13569770701246237

[64] Shearman, D, Smith, JW The climate change challenge and the failure of democracy 2007. Praeger, Davenport, CT, 208 pp.

[65] Mouffe, C The return of the political 1993. Verso, London, 240 pp.

[66] Cabecinhas R, Lázaro A, Carvalho A Lay representations on climate change. Pp 504-508 in Proceedings of IAMCRs 25th conference 2006. IAMCR, Cairo.

Further Reading

Boykoff M, Boykoff J Climate change and journalistic norms: A case-study of US mass-media coverage Geoforum 2007; 38: 1190-1204. DOI:10.1016/j.geoforum.2007.01.008

Carvalho A Representing the politics of the greenhouse effect: Discursive strategies in the British media Critical Discourse Studies 2005; 2(1): 1-29. DOI: 10.1080/17405900500052143

Moser SC, Dilling L eds. Creating a climate for change: Communicating climate change and facilitating social change 2007. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 576 pp.

Smith J Dangerous news: Media decision making about climate change risk Risk Analysis 2005; 25(6): 1471-1482. DOI: 10.1111/j.1539-6924.2005.00693.x

Weingart P, Engels A, Pansegrau P Risks of communication: Discourses on climate change in science, politics, and the mass media Public Understanding of Science 2000; 9: 261-283. DOI: 10.1088/0963-6625/9/3/304

Cross-References

CC-0224: Barriers to engagement

CC-0227: Communicating climate change

CC-0230: Sources, media and modes of climate change communication

CC-0233: Theory and language of climate change communication

CC-0234: Individual and collective perceptions of climate change

CC-0235: Individual understandings of climate change

1 CC-0236: Perceptions of climate change worldwide

2 CC-0239: Framing climate change and public discourses

3 Supplementary Information

4 Click here to insert **Supplementary information text**

5

6 Reviewer suggestions

7

---

[i] The boundaries of the 'public' and 'private' spheres are of course changing and often blurred. Nonetheless, these concepts help distinguish sites with different degrees of visibility.

[ii] Still, this notion does not go as far as some poststructuralist scholarship, which postulates that there is 'no outside' to politics.

Political engagement is understood here as involvement in political activity and therefore is closely related to political participation, which refers to the actual political intervention.

[iii] Some would argue that widening participation on climate decision-making is not necessarily the most effective means to produce responses [64]. The view taken here is that despite the exceptional character of climate change as an object of political regulation, plural input and space for dissent are conditions of sustainability of any decisions in democratic government. As suggested by Mouffe [65], rather than the production of consensus, which can never be full or fixed, the defining trait of democracy should be the enablement of alternative voices and proposals and the creation of fair spaces of negotiation. Dissent can contribute to the development of new ideas and more creative possibilities.

[iv] Although significant, reported barriers to political activism related to more 'selfish' factors, such as 'I'm too busy' (18%) and 'It's too much effort' (16%), were clearly less important. Finally, the option 'I don't know how' gathered 17% of the answers while 'I don't think is important' and 'I do not believe in global warming' got 10% each.

[v] It must be noted, however, that these examples refer mainly to the UK and most do not have a parallel in other countries.

[vi] This has been corroborated by free word association exercises and by a survey conducted in Portugal, which suggested that people view themselves as victims of climate change but not as agents of resolution of the problem, and have a very weak political culture concerning climate change [66, 2].

[vii] 'Collective political subjectivity' is linked to imagined communities of actors organized around a common social project.