Communicating the climate crisis: Introduction to the thematic block

In October 2025, *Nature* reported that the first climate tipping point – defined as the threshold at which small changes precipitate large and irreversible consequences – had been crossed, with the dying off of coral reefs marking this critical juncture (Tollefson 2025). Coral reefs are vital ecosystems, supporting approximately one-quarter of marine biodiversity and sustaining the livelihoods of nearly 1 billion people around the world. The information published by *Nature* drew upon the Global Tipping Points Report 2025 (Lenton et al. 2025), which provides the scientific basis for these claims. When considered alongside observable phenomena like the ever more intense heatwaves, widespread wildfires, catastrophic flooding, and record-breaking temperatures across Europe and elsewhere in recent years, the accumulating evidence of an escalating climate crisis has long been apparent. Correspondingly, the media has paid greater attention to these developments, reflecting the issue's pressing urgency.

However, the media narrative surrounding climate change has been mixed, reflecting divergent emphases, framings, and levels of urgency across outlets. The discursive struggles over the meaning of climate change and the problematisations it entails are long running, and the notion of climate change, which is filled with antagonisms, circulates in a variety of societal fields, including academia, politics, everyday life, and the media (Filimonov and Carpentier 2022). As Trumbo and Shanahan (2000) described two decades ago, accurate measurements of atmospheric carbon dioxide levels began as early as 1957, and scientists have been concerned about the effect that humans might be having on the atmosphere through emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases since the close of the 19th century with the rapid industrialisation of societies. It may thus be argued that the struggle for climate action is as much a matter of communication and media as it is of science, a point underscored by recent research examining how narratives, platforms, and emotional cues shape public perception and political will (Painter et al. 2024).

Although scepticism and denialism of science have long existed, shifting values, growing inequality, and increasing polarisation have created a societal backdrop that adds to these tendencies (see also Achiam et al. 2024). Science generally, and climate science in particular, is frequently subjected to political criticism and populist attacks. As Egelhofer (2023: 361) observes, in today's "post-truth" era concerns about political assaults on the legitimacy of expert knowledge and scientific facts are mounting. Populist politicians often exploit social media platforms to target

science and journalism, portraying them as part of an "evil elite" that deliberately misleads the public with disinformation. While such discourse is deeply troubling, empirical evidence remains limited as to how these accusations influence public perceptions of scientists and journalists (Egelhofer 2023).

Schäfer and Schlichting (2014) stress that climate change is not easy to perceive since it is typically described in terms of large temporal and spatial scales. The complexity of these descriptions, which are largely produced within scientific contexts, extends to the portrayal of climate change impacts. Most individuals hence rely on the media to learn about climate change (Schäfer and Schlichting 2014). Although early research focused primarily on print media, Koteyko and Atanasova (2016) argue that in the past 20 years communication about climate science and policy has been profoundly shaped by the rise of the Internet and social media.

News media serve as crucial sources of climate change information for many, influencing how people think, feel and behave (Schäfer and Mahl 2025), and communicating complex and often abstract climate issues to diverse audiences remains a continuing challenge. The social responsibility held by the media in communicating scientific knowledge therefore requires ongoing emphasis. Climate change and biodiversity loss are profoundly complex phenomena, encompassing scientific concepts, global interconnections, and long-term consequences not always easy for the public to comprehend or relate to in everyday life (Moser 2016). The shift of traditional newspapers to digital platforms brings several consequences, including unequal access to content, changes in reading habits that may reduce the depth of climate reporting, economic pressures favouring popular topics over rigorous analysis, and a faster spread of information with a bigger risk of misinformation. At the same time, greater interactivity has expanded opportunities for engagement, yet also intensified ideological polarisation (Jucá et al. 2024). Moreover, global research trends reveal that most studies on climate communication in print media focus on high-income countries, leaving perspectives from the Global South comparatively underrepresented (Reghunath and Zafar 2024). Deeply entrenched political and economic interests (Klein 2014) have permeated every aspect of public life, impacting both cultural and cognitive patterns that influence understanding, attitudes and action. These structural forces tend to affect traditional science communication, shaping audience engagement with complex issues. In this context, the arts – albeit often marginalised within science communication – offer alternative modes of participation and meaning-making (Bentz 2020). They can reframe complex concepts via affective, symbolic and experiential forms, while also challenging the economic and discursive monopolies that shape public discourse.

This thematic block examines ways of climate issues are communicated that move beyond conventional boundaries between scientific expertise, journalistic mediation, and artistic practice. In a rapidly evolving media landscape subjected to digital transformation, economic pressures, and political polarisation, it calls for more inclusive, reflexive and creative forms of engaging with climate knowledge. By placing collective and participatory approaches in the foreground, the issue shows how understandings of the climate crisis are not simply transmitted but developed through mutual efforts that bring science, culture, and human experience together.

The first paper "Media framing of the biodiversity crisis: A study of a Croatian daily newspaper" broadens the perspective by examining media coverage of the biodiversity issue in Croatia. Through analysis of the longest running daily newspaper in Croatia *Večernji list*, the study reveals how the newspaper has presented the biodiversity crisis over time. The authors examine the thematic frames and additional framing mechanisms by which the issue is portrayed – whether linked to climate change or referred to as a scientific, local or global challenge. Together, these insights highlight how media narratives shape understanding of the biodiversity crisis.

The case of public understanding of the consequences held by climate change is also central to the next paper "Data journalism, deep features, and the geography of climate crisis in a multiracial city: A case study of *The Local*'s 'Toronto's Climate Right Now' issue", which serves as an example of hyperlocal digital journalism addressing climate change in a multiracial urban context. Unlike mainstream digital news, which often overlooks marginalised local perspectives, *The Local* adopts a reflexive approach that challenges hierarchies of race, class and geography. By focusing on the greater Toronto region and stressing solutions-focused reporting and visual storytelling with community members, the paper addresses gaps in research on climate journalism in emerging startups and urban climate justice in the Global North.

Rather than presenting climate change as an abstract problem, the third paper "From observation to understanding: Embedding artistic practice for more effective climate research" explores how visual arts can create stronger engagement with climate science. More precisely, how artistic practice and scientific research can come together in deeper, more reciprocal forms of collaboration transcending the traditional divide between the creative and the analytical. Embedding artistic approaches from the outset allows art to act not as an illustration of science but as an epistemic partner that raises new questions, deepens emotional and interpretive dimensions, and strengthens public engagement.

In conclusion, while scientific understanding of the causes and consequences of the climate crisis has matured as a highly refined body of knowledge, public understanding of this scientific knowledge remains incomplete and uneven, creating gaps between what the evidence shows and how individuals perceive the risks, responsibility, and possible actions. At a time of complex and multilayered climate challenges, it is ever clearer that scientific knowledge does not circulate in isolation but is always embedded within cultural values, language, and modes of representation. Scholars and practitioners recognise that responding to the climate crisis requires more than the transmission of facts – it calls for new modes of collaboration that bridge analytical and affective ways of sense-making. Hopefully, the thematic block will contribute to these ongoing discussions.

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