

Reviewing the Climate Reviewers: a Science Studies Approach

Poster Presentation

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Since 2009 the reflexive approaches of climate change science have become very topical, particularly the review process and the consensus-building efforts, i.e. the future of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as well as the lessons of the CRU-incident (University of East Anglia, Climatic Research Unit – email scandal) are under scrutiny. The paper brings the nature of climate change controversy into focus, especially its appearance in the scientific field.

Our poster-paper argues that we should understand the debates, because the events of 2009 revealed its significance, i.e. its blocking-effect in mitigation policy, and in the engagement of mobilizing people. To our analysis we apply the theoretical approach of science studies, e.g. the sociology of science programme of the so called ‘Edinburgh School’, the ‘post-normal science’ idea, the ‘field’ concept of Pierre Bourdieu, or the often cited book by Bruno Latour: ‘Science in Action’, which offered also methodological background to the paper, showing the rhetoric and literature-interpretation tools used by the scientists.

Our main goal is to understand how science works, how it is used in the debates between the ‘mainstream’ and the ‘climate change sceptics’ today. In our study particularly two reports from both sides (IPCC AR4 WGI. ‘physical science bases and NIPCC ‘Climate change reconsidered’) are analysed, putting the emphasis on the reference lists, the use of citations in the text and on how the scientific truth was created.

In the course of our work, first, the reference lists were processed and analysed with the tools of scientometrics: which are the main scientific journals by the number of citations, what is the overlapping between the reference lists? We show the answers to these questions in our poster-presentation. Secondly, using the same references and focusing particularly to the topic of climate extremes, the scientific context and the way of interpretation of these references were analysed. In our paper we present some interesting examples.

‘Reviewing’ the climate reviewers – our conclusion to this topic will be astonishing and at the same time evident. Climate science works the same way, as we came to know science in our closer field; the problem is that we thought climate science is different.