



## COP 15

The [15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties \(COP 15\)](#) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will take place from December 7<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> 2009 in Copenhagen. The conference is a crucial event as it will determine the rules of Post-Kyoto - the Kyoto Protocol was concluded in 1997, establishing legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and will expire in 2012.) All signs point however to the possibility that no legally binding agreement will be achieved in Copenhagen and that at best it will yield a political agreement and some steps towards a treaty.

## The Run up to Copenhagen: Communication Before and After the Event

In the context of the upcoming COP 15 in Copenhagen in December (see adjacent box), the question of how to communicate climate change effectively is more present than ever. Among researchers there is consensus that emission targets can only be achieved by combining policy making with strategies that engage citizens at a personal level. The numerous citizen actions which have emerged throughout the world in the run up to the conference in Copenhagen (see box on the next page) show that a certain level of awareness is already present among the public. The question however will be how these concerned citizens will react in the case of a weak outcome in Copenhagen. How should communication then be shaped so as not to discourage them and to keep them mobilised in the fight against climate change? Additionally, how can awareness be raised among the general public that is not yet sufficiently aware of climate change and its impacts?

To find answers to these questions it makes sense, apart from comparing high impact initiatives from different countries, to also have a look at the latest scientific findings that can give some indications on how to best communicate on climate change.

## How to engage the public in climate change issues?

For most people in Europe, climate change is geographically and temporally distant from their daily lives. To avoid denial, doubt or disinterest, researchers found that impacts have to be presented for the near future, rather than for the longer term. This is obviously challenging as, for example, differences in 20 years' time are likely to be negligible compared to differences in 50 years. Furthermore, researchers recommend giving the public details on the methods and sources of information used to produce the scenarios to increase their credibility. Other advice provided in the research is that scenarios should be motivational and not based on shock or alarm.<sup>1</sup>

A recent study tries to explain this fact by pointing out that frightening images of climate change may initially attract public attention, but are also causing denial, apathy and avoidance as a way of coping with the unpleasant feeling they bring. In many cases, these fear-provoking images are often forgotten after the initial impact. The results of the study also show that the public has a lot of images in mind that they strongly associate with climate change, such as melting icesheets, visions of rising sea levels and intense heat and droughts. These images tend however to give them the feeling that climate change happens somewhere else, to somebody else. This sometimes results in the adoption of a fatalistic attitude by some individuals, feeling they are unable to do anything to help.<sup>2</sup>

*"Frightening images of climate change may initially attract public attention, but are also causing denial, apathy and avoidance as a way of coping with the unpleasant feeling they bring."*

*'Fear Won't Do It: Promoting Positive Engagement with Climate Change through Visual and Iconic Representations', Study, 2009*



Project managers from around the world in front of the Danish Parliament in March 2009, where WWViews was officially launched.

## Citizen actions

Several NGOs and organisations have joined forces to make their actions more visible and new organisations have emerged. [TckTckTck](#), for instance, is a global alliance of international, national and local organisations addressing environment, development, poverty, human rights, health and humanitarian issues, all calling for a fair, ambitious and binding climate change treaty in December. Its partners include some of the large international civil society organisations, such as the World Wildlife Fund, Oxfam, and Amnesty International. Several hundred thousand people have also signed the petition of the UN Worldwide Campaign on Climate Change '[Seal the Deal!](#)' which aims at galvanizing political will and public support for reaching a comprehensive global climate agreement in Copenhagen.

In this context, interesting initiatives have been launched to give citizens from all around the world the possibility of being heard and of influencing global climate policy (see box at the bottom of the page for an example).

To effectively engage the public with climate change issues, smarter communication strategies are needed. Previous research has found that even in countries where the public is relatively well informed about climate change, this does not translate into behavioural changes. Researchers suggest therefore that instead of dictating what people should do, the local and personal benefits of climate change mitigation should be emphasised. This includes the financial savings associated with energy efficiency measures, as well as improved personal fitness and air quality due to reduced reliance on transport.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the choice of the right message and the way of presenting it, a study showed that the choice of media is also of key importance. It looked at the relationship between media use and people's perceptions of climate change and showed that watching television has no significant impact on viewers' knowledge about the issue of climate change. Reading newspapers and using the web, however, seem to contribute to people's knowledge about the issue and they are more likely to be concerned about it.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lorenzoni, I. and Hulme, M. (2009), 'Believing is seeing: laypeople's views of future socio-economic and climate change in England and in Italy', *Public Understanding of Science*, Vol. 18, 383-400.

<sup>2</sup> O'Neill, S. and Nicholson-Cole, S. (2009), 'Fear Won't Do It: Promoting Positive Engagement with Climate Change through Visual and Iconic Representations', *Science Communication*, Vol. 30(3), 355-379.

<sup>3</sup> Ockwell, D., Whitmarsh, L. and O'Neill, S. (2009), 'Reorienting Climate Change Communication for Effective Mitigation', *Science Communication*, Vol. 30 (3), 305-323.

<sup>4</sup> Xiaoquan, Z. (2009), 'Media Use and Global Warming Perceptions: A Snapshot of the Reinforcing Spirals', *Communication Research*, Vol. 36 (5), 698-723.



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## World Wide Views on Global Warming

Giving citizens around the world the opportunity to define and communicate their opinions and positions on climate change issues was the main idea of the organisers of the first global citizen consultation on climate change, [World Wide Views on Global Warming](#) (WWViews). The Danish Board of Technology, who launched the initiative, was persuaded that global political decision-making processes can benefit when 'ordinary' people participate. 4000 citizens in 38 countries all over the world gathered therefore on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009 in their respective countries to lead discussions about climate change. The scene was identical around the world: after having received some training on the climate issue, citizen groups of the same size met to discuss some of the key issues of the COP 15 negotiations, following a precise protocol, and then voted by answering the same questions. The issues involved questioned for instance the solidarity between rich and poor, and also focused on the big geopolitical question which is central to climate change, the issue of solidarity and equity among nations and continents.

The results of these meetings were published in a policy report containing detailed analyses and nine clear policy recommendations from citizens to politicians:

- Make a deal at COP15
- Keep the temperature increase below 2 degrees
- Annex 1 countries (e.g. USA, EU, Japan, Australia) should reduce emissions by 25-40 % or more by 2020
- Fast-growing economies should also reduce emissions by 2020
- Low-income developing countries should limit emissions
- Give high priority to an international financial mechanism
- Punish non-complying countries
- Make technology available to everyone
- Strengthen or supplement international institutions