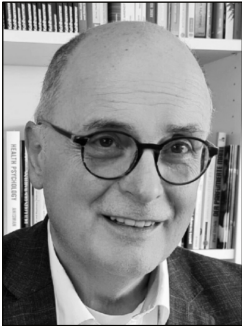


The price of climate alarmism

“Climate fear” is not the way to a better world

by Michael Klein,* Germany



Michael Klein.
(Photo ma)

Many activists and politicians believe they have to scare people in order to stop global warming. This has massive mental consequences, especially for the younger generation.

Everyone is talking about the climate. Terms such as “climate change”, “climate crisis” or “climate catastrophe” now dominate the media. As a recent empirical analysis showed, the topic of climate has appeared in almost every second “Tagesschau” news programme on ARD public television in Germany over the last two years – even if there were no current events directly related to it.

Climate change is also used in public broadcasters’ news programmes to trigger a mental crisis among the population, especially the younger generation, with the help of fear-inducing reporting and connotations. Representatives of the “Psychologists for Future” movement and other “Fridays for Future” groups are calling for fear-inducing climate reporting in the media to make people compliant and obedient. Yet especially they lack the critical distance to the topic of climate fear.

The widespread presence of climate issues in everyday life creates chronically negative emotions and moods – without considering the possible long-term effects. It is risky for mental health, especially if permanently distressing feelings and affects prevail, a combination that is particularly intense in childhood and adolescence. As a result of the climate alarmist development of the media, the concepts used have also become radicalised. There has been an anxiety-intensifying shift from “climate change” to terms such as “climate crisis” and “climate catastrophe”.

Especially younger people are becoming increasingly anxious, panicky and depressed as a result of the media’s constant presentation of crisis scenarios relating to coronavirus, war and climate.

A hyper-stressful public mood that permanently triggers worry, depression and panic does not help anyone to cope with the tasks of the future. On the contrary, it poses a threat to the mental health of the next generation. Permanent alarmism on climate issues also does a disservice to a successful, sustainable environmental protection policy, which requires differentiated, critical, and rationalist research as well as innovative and smart solutions.

Making the population compliant

Climate psychologists from the organisation “Psychologists for Future” are calling for the media to report on the climate crisis daily. These and other activist groups recommend that journalists put the climate issue at the top of the agenda and spread fear of the future.

The situation is already critical about the processing of climate-related reports: a study by the University of Erfurt has shown that more and more people are turning away from public climate reporting: 26 per cent of those surveyed would avoid such reports often or very often and a further 17 per cent occasionally.

Little is known about the long-term consequences of such fear-inducing reports. The aim is to instil a deep and lasting fear in the population through constant climate scare reports, which ultimately leads them to accept all measures, no matter how far-reaching, without complaint.

The strategy behind media climate communication bears unmistakable similarities to the Corona virus communication policy, where an internal paper from the German Ministry of the Interior recommended the use of fear and panic messages as a suitable communication strategy. Fear – as has been known for thousands of years – is the best way to make people and the masses compliant and dependent.

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Critical questions about the basis and validity of climate forecasts are routinely denigrated as conspiracy theories by climate activists and journalists alike. In science, too, the usual and necessary critical reflections are omitted.

The intolerant and non-sovereign attitude of most climate activists is striking. They present themselves as those who have the only correct wisdom, i.e., in a certain sense they are the enlightened ones, which authorises them crush all critical questions and reflections. Their enlightenment gives them the subjective right to instil fear of the future in children and young people through hysterical depictions of the climate. A mass education experiment with an uncertain outcome.

The climate problem is becoming a climate anxiety problem

Climate anxiety is now a widespread term. In an international study of 10,000 participants from ten countries published in the scientific journal "Lancet" in 2021, two thirds of respondents reported feeling anxious about climate change. 60 per cent were very worried or extremely worried that climate change was threatening humanity and the planet. 75 per cent said that the future was frightening for them and 56 per cent were certain that humanity was doomed. More than 45 per cent said that their daily lives were negatively affected by climate fears. Increasingly, more and more activists are concluding that they no longer want to bring children into the world because of the extremely threatening future.

In Germany, two thirds of respondents in the most recent Shell Youth Study from 2019 said that climate change made them very anxious. Climate anxiety is particularly widespread among children and young people. In addition to younger people, students and academics tend to report more climate anxiety. Women, who suffer from anxiety disorders more often than men, also have more climate anxiety problems.

These vulnerable groups are also the primary target groups of apocalyptic climate reporting. Interestingly, this is less likely to resonate with socially anchored, established groups – craftsmen, technicians, engineers, older people with life experience. What young people need more than ever today regarding climate fears is psychological resilience to the constant bombardment of fear messages. Activist and negativist attitudes are poorly suited to this.

In the long term, the hyper-emotions generated by the media put a strain on people's stress systems and can lead to mental disorders. As understandable as anxiety may be in individual cases as a spontaneous reaction to permanent exposure to disaster scenarios, this helps neither the people affected nor the cause.

Increasingly, it is climate alarmism that is making people ill: anxiety disorders, especially phobias, panic disorders and generalised anxiety disorders, depression and psychosis are the possible consequences. Climate anxiety as such is not yet officially recognised as a mental illness because this would mean recognising the exaggerated irrationality of anxiety, a criterion of the illness category "phobia".

The narrative of climate tipping points is particularly suitable for creating fears about the future. The scientific soundness of climate tipping points is weak, as the global climate has followed cycles for millions of years and has never shown irreversible tipping points.

However, the social tipping points pose a real danger, with more and more people succumbing to the alarmist extreme messages, leading to hysteria, radicalization, and panic. Because critics of climate alarmism, which has become mainstream in the leading media, no longer get a chance to speak or are threatened by *cancel culture* and *deplatforming*, the culture of critical debate that is so necessary for public opinion is missing.

In the media, there is a permanent mood of alarm on all channels, which many public broadcasters are also participating in. First and foremost, however, climate communication should promote a critical examination of the data and point out possible solutions.

If fear and panic are continuously fuelled, the risk of chronic anxiety disorders, depression, but also resignation and numbing increases in the medium and long term, as the stress generated cannot otherwise be tolerated. For a considerable number of recipients of constant climate horror stories, the path leads to climate anxiety and depression. It is hard to believe how journalists and editorial teams can be so naive or willing to take such risks as to permanently exert climate stress on the audience.

Information is needed

If there is a lack of critical distance between the topic and the assessment, a dangerous mixture

of pseudo-objectivity and actionism arises. Most media representatives pick up on the alarmist mood and reinforce it. This creates ever new fearful feedback loops for the media audience. The constant repetition of highly emotional messages creates conformism among recipients, paralyses scepticism and contradiction, but also causes anxiety and depression in many. Often repeated messages wear down vulnerable people and make them dependent.

Disaster and doomsday fantasies now dominate the thoughts and actions of more than half of young people. All a good mixture for a post-modern religion, but not a good prerequisite for a better society, let alone for saving the world. This requires rationality, innovation, and clever behavioural incentives. Creating constant fear and terror leads most of all young people into fear and dependency. What is needed to overcome fear is not fear, but prudence, serenity, and wisdom.

We need to deconstruct hyper-emotional climate reporting. Instead of alarmism, the media should openly present the entire breadth of climate research and the consequences for climate policy, including sceptical and critical attitudes.

At best, people can inform themselves by consulting media and researchers who report critically and controversially. Above all, it is important for anxious recipients of climate reporting to understand that research is never unanimous and homogeneous. Since *Galileo Galilei* and *Albert Einstein*, science has thrived on contradiction and doubt.

The preservation of creation should succeed out of insight and not out of fear of hellfire. There is a need for environmentally sensitive and nature-friendly education that strengthens shared responsibility for the environment and climate without jeopardising people's mental health and prosperity by creating lasting fear and irrational political consequences.

People can adapt well to crises and changes if they receive critical and differentiated information, experience support and a sense of community. Ultimately, everyone needs to form a picture of the world in which we want to and will live. Climate fear, climate panic and climate psychosis are certainly not the way to a better world.

Source: «Schweizer Monat» Edition 1111, November 2023.
<https://schweizermonat.ch/focus/psychische-gesundheit/>.
1 November 2023
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