

### **How well does Society understand Climate Change?**

The last years' consequences of climate change becomes an increasingly pressing matter. If you ask a climate researcher, it would not come as a surprise, but what about other instances from society? The scope of this paper aims to test and evaluate views on climate change from additional perspectives. For this purpose, 3 interviewees with backgrounds in politics, finance, and business were chosen, areas notoriously critiqued by climate activists to have been following business as usual. The paper is structured around one broad question in order to specify in what areas these individuals have knowledge, and where they do not.

#### *Discuss the possible impacts of global warming over the next 100 years*

The interviewees with political and business backgrounds provided analogous answers to the question. They both initially stated that the rising temperatures would lead to extreme weather events globally, causing some regions to become uninhabitable, particularly those which are warmer in the poorer global South, where it most likely may become too dry to live and produce. As a result, large-scale famine and migration towards habitable areas would follow, in turn causing political conflicts, and social unrest in these areas. One of the interviewees argues that we have seen how badly prepared Europe would be for such an event, during the refugee crisis in 2015, which saw the rise of populism, extremism, and inhumane conditions for refugees in Europe, however this time it would be worse. Furthermore, they highlighted that mobilizing civil society to address these issues has become increasingly more challenging, where opinion bubbles reinforced by social media and fake news may hamper the necessary social mobilization needed to respond to future crises of climate change humanely. Furthermore, they emphasized that by virtue of the global South being hit the hardest, we likely will see an increase in the current segregation between developed and developing countries.

Interestingly, but not surprisingly enough, the interviewee with a background in finance took a different route when asked the question. Compared with the other interviewees who left out the economics entirely, he emphasized that the economic system would actually be the first to collapse. He argued that climate change would impede the insurance market's ability to reasonably assess risk premiums in areas under threat of climate catastrophes, and sometimes even neglect them entirely. This has been exemplified in the southern U.S. and Australia which are forecasted to be continuously struck by extreme weather in the future, repelling

insurance companies. Now, extend this to production, agriculture, and transportation, if these sectors similar to the residential markets become vulnerable and uncertain as a result of climate change (which he argues they will), insurance companies are disincentivized to cover breaches of contracts and move away or increase prices. As a result, the insurance market will weaken, damaging our economic activity severely unleashing a ripple effect in productiveness, unemployment, and ultimately our standard of living, followed by social unrest and political extremism.

All three interviewees share the conclusion that the impacts of climate change will be catastrophic but from different angles. They related the consequences of climate change to something in their field of specialty, which was exemplified in how two interviewees completely disregarded the economic perspective, while that was the sole focus of the interviewee with a finance background. Although it makes sense, their reasoning regarding the ecological perspective was somewhat limited to droughts hitting- and causing mass migration from the global South. Albeit true, the global South will be hit first and hardest, with disastrous consequences for people and the environment, the global North is not safe either. Coastal cities are threatened by rising sea levels, which would entail mass migration and social unrest (among other things). Furthermore, rising sea levels threaten the natural balance of the Gulf Stream, exposing the Nordics to transform into an arctic climate, as well as the risk of new diseases spreading as a result of rising temperatures. The point is, broad perspectives need to be taken into consideration in order to understand the severity of climate change, no one is really safe, and if this is understood, our possibility of collaboration dramatically increases. And on the topic of collaboration, I appreciated the perspective of social media divisiveness, where these systems are designed to create opinion bubbles, extreme views, and polarity as this is how to maximize user interaction. Thus these effects need to be addressed, as they hamper our ability to collaborate while simultaneously being interwoven in our society. Personally, the biggest implication regarding climate change is the tipping points we most likely will surpass, where the melting permafrost in tundras will release a continuous stream of methane (80x more efficient GHG compared with CO<sub>2</sub>), which implies that there is no action that can be done to reverse it, and that is only one of many tipping points.

In essence, the general understanding these three interviewees showed regarding the implications of climate change in the coming 100 years showed to be good in the social and

economic aspects, but none really dwelled on the details of what climate change actually means in terms of ecosystem balances and mechanisms. Furthermore, the interviewee with a background in finance showed little to no knowledge of climate systems, while the interviewees with backgrounds in business and politics mostly reasoned around the social consequences followed by increases in temperatures and droughts in the global South. What I found most interesting was how all three interviewees acknowledged that the system in which we organize ourselves is driving us toward catastrophe. However, none foresaw nor suggested how fundamentally restructuring this apparently defective society was a possible impact of climate change in the coming 100 years. This shows that their knowledge regarding alternative concepts suggested by researchers such as the circular economy and degrowth was lacking. Ironically, acknowledging the dangers without mentioning a solution, characterizes the exact way of thinking these areas have been criticized for; continue with business as usual.

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