**The research IS NOT about...**

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PhD course '*Research – or how to get wiser'.*

The Ph.D. I am conducting IS about trying to visually communicate complex topics such as climate change and the effects human societies have had and will continue to have, on the environment. However, what the Ph.D. is NOT, is an amplification of such societal and ecological challenges.

When making someone (the public) sensitive to something so vast and complex as the challenges following global warming and other anthropocentric challenges, that hold such a vast amount of causalities and uncertainties that they almost seem abstract, I find that visual representation becomes a useful tool. Able to convey information and findings to a broad audience in an engaging fashion. However, I find that the representation of such topics are sometimes, if not often, rendered overly saturated and sets a tone of public fear and anxiety.

You might see this when a presenter of such topics, a news reporter for instance, realizes, that the scope of a given scenario is difficult to communicate, thus failing to catch peoples attention. Rather than just laying out the facts of a given scenario with the risk of having the story vanish in the news feed, it is tempting for the reporter to convey a similar scenario that is much more extreme, as it would be more likely to make headlines and become a topic of conversation.

Just prior to starting my Ph.D., I had noticed that various media had picked up upon the 'story' of global warming and sea level rise and had conveyed such stories much in the fashion of Hollywood disaster movies. One example was that London would succumb to the rising sea levels because there was a possibility that sea levels might rise as much as 21 meters in the coming centuries. A much unlikely, if not impossible scenario, but the story was never the less supported by a graphic illustration of the capital rendered underwater with only the Tower Thames penetrating the waves. The problem with such a story, as I see it, is that such selection of information, the ways it is rendered and the modes of representation, promotes disastrous depictions for the sake of grasping attention. Something that, I believe, makes people increasingly insensitive to climate change. Not more sensitive, and thereby (I suppose) the opposite of what was the initial purpose of the study/new report initially was intended to do; creating attention and awareness to an important topic. I believe one reason for humans to become increasingly insensitive, is that in order for humans to go about with their everyday lives, they will need to filter such doomsday scenarios out. Otherwise, they would be living in perpetual fear. Constant fear of annihilation is not a human trait. The human brain opposes such defeatism by filtering out an overload of doomsday scenarios. Perhaps because they are not productive - in a biological or in a reproductive sense. For why further the human race if the race is already doomed?

I do, however, understand the dilemmas the reporters might be facing. It is challenging to raise awareness of something on a broad scale if you cannot illustrate it in a fashion, that directly refers to humans' immediate lives. If for instance, a presenter of facts and knowledge is to visually render the impact of 1 meter of sea-level-rise on a map of the coastline of the U.S., the changes would be almost invisible to the untrained eye; even though the implications of such a shift in water levels might actually be extreme. If the presenter instead would choose to render a 10-meter sea level rise, a more unlikely scenario, it would render most of Miami and Florida under water. A much better scenario to visualize if the goal is to get people's attention. The problem is, that the IPCC reports of sea level rise predict a possible worst-case scenario of around 2 meters by the year 2100. A number far from the level of change that would resonate graphically well on a map. If You would, however, consult various media, You would find plenty of examples of researchers claiming that a 6-meter sea level rise would be possible in coming centuries. A claim much less likely to happen, but much more powerful as a message than a 1-2 meter rise. So what do You choose when presenting these findings in an attempt to raise awareness of dire concerns? A 1-meter change, not getting peoples attention? OR a 6 or 10-meter change, that might come off so cataclysmic, that people would fend it off, to not get discouraged?

I believe that a nuanced approach IS important. Because knowing about what potentially could happen, even in a distant future, is an important part of modern society. Not to predict, but to envision what might come to be and then prepare for such changes. But to solely focus on overly saturated scenarios, simply to prove a point, I believe defeats the purpose. A more suitable approach is therefore a less saturated approach. One that takes a distance to the subject (I do not use the term objective approach, as there is no objectivity in artistic production) and unfolds it in various ways, relating to various time spans. NOT an amplification of the consequences of a set of challenges, but also NOT an exclusion of such.