

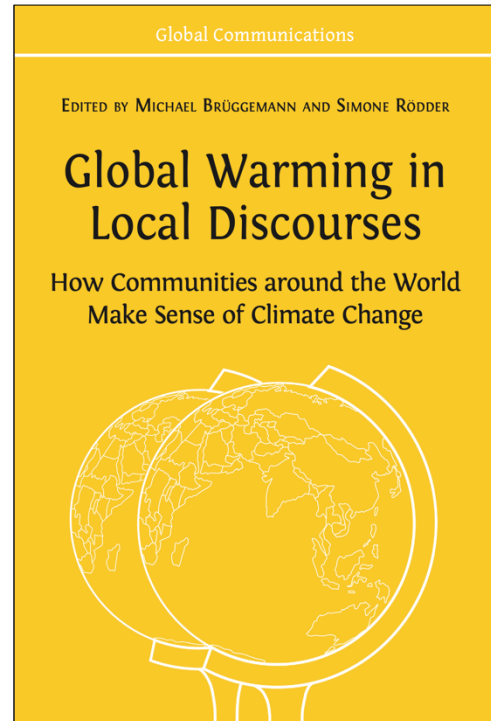
Michael Brüggemann and Simone Rödder (Eds.), **Global Warming in Local Discourses: How Communities around the World Make Sense of Climate Change**, Cambridge, UK: Open Book, 2020, 270 pp., \$27.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by
Lijing Gao
Boston College

In *Global Warming in Local Discourses: How Communities Around the World Make Sense of Climate Change*, edited by Michael Brüggemann and Simone Rödder, the aim is to investigate the convoluted ways local discourses worldwide interpret and engage with a “traveling idea” like climate change through case studies. Grounded in influences ranging from direct experiences of extreme weather, mediated reports, educational NGO activities, and preexisting values and belief systems, this book addresses the tension between “the impersonal, apolitical and universal imaginary of climate change projected by science” and “the subjective, situated and normative imaginations of human actors engaging with nature” (Jasanoff, 2010, p. 233).

Chapter 1, “We Are Climate Change: Climate Debates Between Transnational and Local Discourses,” written by the two editors, Michael Brüggemann and Simone Rödder, introduces the book’s exploration of local discourse on global warming and climate change, drawing from diverse disciplinary traditions. The book leverages the strengths of anthropology’s thorough, detailed descriptions of the subjects it studies, as showcased in chapters 3 (Philippines) and 5 (Tanzania), drawing on Geertz (1973). Meanwhile, it utilizes in-depth interviews and focus groups conducted within the media and journalism disciplinary traditions as presented in chapters 2 (Greenland) and 6 (Bangladesh), and adopts mixed-method approaches in chapter 4 (Germany). Moreover, the editors have effectively synthesized and analyzed the diverse case studies, drawing out overarching themes, contrasts, and emergent patterns. This approach offers readers an integrated understanding of global community responses to climate change, rather than just isolated insights from each case. This book investigates sense-making as a process of social construction through communities extending beyond the extensively studied Anglo-Saxon realm to encompass industrialized nations and Global South perspectives. Each of these probes three dimensions of climate-change discourse: communication patterns about climate change, emerging interpretations from these communications, and the intricate interplay of meanings from both local and transnational sources, revealing how scientific and alternative framings of climate change converse.

In chapter 2, titled “The Case of ‘Costa del Nuuk’: Greenlanders Make Sense of Global Climate Change,” communication expert Freja C. Eriksen investigated the perceptions of Greenlanders on the



impacts of climate change under the influence of both media exposure and personal experiences. Drawing from the social representations theory, Eriksen combines media influences with firsthand accounts, grounding her insights on five focus group discussions with 15 Nuuk residents in Greenland's capital. Eriksen's study counters media portrayals, showing that despite vivid images of melting icebergs, Greenlanders do not see themselves as climate victims but use humorous terms like "Costa del Nuuk" to articulate their unique perspective on warming trends. This sentiment underscores a broader Greenlandic view of the climate as inherently fluid and ever changing. Despite their critiques of the media's one-dimensional climate narratives, such narratives remain impactful. Eriksen's chapter navigates the interplay between these global media stories and local Greenlandic discourses, contrasting urgent scientific warnings about the Arctic's rapid warming with a local emphasis on historical resilience and the potential benefits of a warmer environment.

In chapter 3, "Communication and Knowledge Transfer on Climate Change in the Philippines: The Case of Palawan," anthropologist Thomas Friedrich investigates the perception of climate change on Palawan, an island where environmental conservation holds prominence. Friedrich examines the local reinterpretation of climate change through a comprehensive ethnographic approach contextualized within existing ecological knowledge and cultural practices. Drawing inspiration from Hulme's (2009) notion of climate change as a "traveling idea," the chapter illustrates a top-down evolution of the climate change concept. Key communicators like Palawan's government and a local NGO play pivotal roles. While the government has championed environmental discourse since the 1990s, the NGO employs theatrical performances to underscore the links between local environmental misdeeds and natural disasters, reinforcing prevalent eco-friendly paradigms.

In chapter 4, titled "Sense-Making of COP 21 Among Rural and City Residents: The Role of Space in Media Reception," a media and communication studies author team (Dorothee Arlt, Michael Brüggemann, Fenja De Silva-Schmidt, and Imke Hoppe) investigated the influence of spatial factors on media reception and climate-change awareness, drawing from a wider research project focused on the Conference of the Parties (COP) 21 climate summit in Paris. Comparing urban Hamburg with rural Otterndorf, the study analyzes how spatial contexts, both physical and social, and media reception shape climate change perceptions. Using focus group discussions, media diaries, and an online survey, the authors find similar media consumption patterns in both regions but divergent personal concerns about climate impacts, emphasizing the role of local ties and historical experiences in shaping these perceptions. The prevailing understanding of anthropogenic climate change contrasts with the distant global policy discourse experienced by local German communities.

In chapter 5, "What Does Climate Change Mean to Us, the Maasai? How Climate-Change Discourse Is Translated in Maasailand, Northern Tanzania," anthropologist Sara de Wit delves into the Maasai community's interpretation of climate change discourse, based on 14 months of ethnographic research in Northern Tanzania. Drawing on cultural theories of risk perception, the chapter explores how this group, shaped profoundly by religion and untouched by Western life, understands climate change. While the Maasai view fluctuations in weather as inherent to life, they find the dominant climate change narrative confronting their deep-seated religious beliefs. De Wit examines how the transnational discourse on climate change, as disseminated by media,

the church, and NGOs, intersects with Maasai beliefs, arguing that their limited engagement with the topic is less about knowledge gaps and more about preserving their core values and beliefs.

In chapter 6, "Living on the Frontier: Laypeople's Perceptions and Communication of Climate Change in the Coastal Region of Bangladesh," communication scholar Shameem Mahmud examines the public perceptions of climate change in developing regions, particularly in a coastal district of Bangladesh neighboring the world's largest mangrove forest. Drawing from climate communication literature, Mahmud's study, which involved interviewing 38 residents, half of whom were illiterate, found that participants acquired knowledge on climate change primarily from mass media, NGOs, and local leaders, focusing on salinization and sea-level rise. He identifies two principal sense-making patterns: associating climate change with local geohazards like storms and increased salinity, and correlating it with observed weather variations, revealing that firsthand experiences and local "place identity" combined with external communication heighten climate change risk awareness in this coastal community.

Chapter 7, "Extreme Weather Events and Local Impacts of Climate Change: The Scientific Perspective," is written by climate scientist Friederike E. L. Otto. This chapter introduces the field of event attribution science. Also, it presents the current understanding of how climate change influences extreme weather events and seasonal phenomena in regions discussed in the volume. The chapter complements the other chapters that delve into local interpretations of climate change.

The edited volume responds astutely to the evolving paradigm which underscores the significance of community engagement in bolstering climate resilience. By offering intricate case studies, the research elucidates the profound and multifaceted ways communities from Greenland to Bangladesh, and Tanzania to Germany, navigate and respond to global climate discourses, particularly in terms of their perception and stance on anthropogenic climate change. Such an understanding is indispensable for the broader policy landscape. The selected chapters have a pronounced emphasis on qualitative research methods, often drawing from smaller sample sizes. While this approach undoubtedly offers deep, nuanced insights into local interpretations and lived experiences, it is worth noting the limitations inherent to such a methodology.

The volume advocates for the recognition of communities not as passive recipients but as active interlocutors in the climate dialogue, echoing the sentiment that communities ought to be partners in resilience building. This aligns seamlessly with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report (2022), which emphasizes the indispensability of diverse knowledge systems, be it scientific, indigenous, or local, in forging a resilient path forward. Furthermore, the research underscores the pivotal role of local beliefs, norms, and practices in modulating a community's perception and stance on anthropogenic climate change. Such an understanding is indispensable for the broader policy landscape. By anchoring climate strategies in the bedrock of local beliefs and norms, policymakers and financial institutions can tailor more effective, grassroots-level interventions. This book is particularly valuable for scholars and professionals exploring the interplay between place identity, communal cultural sense-making, and their implications for climate change attitudes and adaptation.

References

- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures* (Vol. 5019). New York, NY: Basic.
- Hulme, M. (2009). *Why we disagree about climate change: Understanding controversy, inaction and opportunity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2022). Climate change 2022: Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability. Contribution of working group II to the sixth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. In H.-O. Pörtner, D. C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E. S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, . . . & B. Rama (Eds.), *Summary for policymakers* (pp. 3–33). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009325844.001>
- Jasanoff, S. (2010). A new climate for society. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 27(2–3), 233–253. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026327640936149>