

Graz Charter for Climate Communication

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Authorised translation from German

Preamble

1. The debate on how to tackle the climate crisis which societies have conducted thus far has reached its limits. Warning of the threatening changes to the climate system in ever more drastic terms is not enough. This approach is based on the expectation that for this reason alone politicians and society will engage in a rational dialogue and decide on appropriate measures. Therefore, we call upon everyone who wants to promote climate protection and climate adaptation to communicate in a new, mobilising manner.
2. This new climate communication takes people's ways of thinking, living conditions and needs seriously, aiming to link messages to these personal traits. This is what we are advocating for with this charter. Communication is crucial for democratic societies to find a way to live in harmony within the planetary boundaries.
3. This charter aims to define guidelines for people who communicate about the climate crisis and about climate protection, whether professionally or through civic engagement. We call for communication to be considered as part of the solution, going far beyond its current role as a somewhat necessary add-on
4. The contribution of public institutions is crucial. In the 2015 Paris Agreement, the signatory states committed to "taking measures to enhance climate change education, training, public awareness, public participation and public access to information". The 2021 UN Climate Summit in Glasgow further specified this mandate: Parties to the agreement should develop strategies for communicating on climate change based on "targeted sociological research with a view to encouraging behavioural change". We see this as an obligation of governments and the public sector to engage in holistic, mobilising and impact-oriented climate communication.

What we are observing – and want to avoid in future

5. Science provides clear evidence of anthropogenic climate change. While knowledge of causes, consequences and options for action is essential, knowledge alone is not enough to steer society on a path that protects and preserves the natural foundations of life. Various feasible options for solving the crises are on the table for society to debate and decide upon.
6. In climate communication, the information-deficit model is still predominant. According to this model, facts alone are enough to convince people and motivate them to demand and engage in climate protection measures. This model, however, has been scientifically refuted and is unsuitable for effective climate communication.
7. The current form of communication emphasises the problem and frequently presents catastrophic scenarios. But all too often, such communication has a

paralysing, unsettling and polarising effect, especially if it merely highlights problems and risks without pointing to solutions and options for action. Climate communication is required to provide guidance, that is, to gauge and assess which of the discussed options and suggestions are effective and which are not.

8. Often the discourse is dominated by the perfectionist notion that climate protection will only be possible if solutions free of contradictions are found. However, since climate protection in the real world always involves trade-offs and negotiation, the illusion of not needing to compromise is a further paralysing factor.
9. Communication on climate protection often fails to clearly define its goals and target groups. It ignores the diversity of human values and characteristics, as well as the uneven distribution of agency. This is another reason why it leaves too much room for the destructive potential of disinformation and discourses of delay.
10. Climate communication has so far relied too heavily on intuition, craftsmanship or even marketing. In doing so, it wastes considerable potential: where the natural sciences provide indispensable knowledge about anthropogenic climate change, social science research provides key insights into societal change. However, climate communication has so far hardly made systematic use of these insights.
11. Even the best communication will reach its limits where the prevailing circumstances stand in people's way to act in a climate-friendly fashion. Far too often this proves costly for the individual, time-consuming or downright impossible; far too often acting in climate-damaging fashion is favoured and even subsidised. Under these conditions, communication gets nowhere and even runs the risk of triggering resentment and resistance.

What we stand for – and how we want to work

12. This charter advocates communication that examines: What are the underlying conditions of human perception and understanding, decision-making and action? How do these levels interact? Climate communication draws on these insights to foster public support for climate policy and to motivate people to take action. It aims to bring about change at both the structural and individual levels.
13. The new climate communication counteracts polarisation and social division. It empowers people to recognise and challenge disinformation and discourses of delay. It promotes wide social debate, including controversial debates in the pursuit of the best possible solutions. It is compatible with the values of different social groups and societal backgrounds – as long as these adhere to democratic and liberal norms. In this way, climate communication contributes to the development of a shared social understanding of a way of life in harmony with the natural foundations of life.
14. Climate protection is not just about bans and appeals for sacrifice, as its opponents would have us believe. Attractive and economically advantageous solutions for shaping the future have long been available. Implementing them often comes with “desirable side effects” (co-benefits). Highlighting these advantages and thus changing people's perspectives can help to garner support and reduce resistance.
15. Mobilising climate communication takes an impartial look at the complete range of political instruments: from enabling and funding instruments to pricing and regulation.
16. Solution-oriented climate communication also equips people to deal with ambiguity [and to develop a tolerance for it]. Not every promising approach is without

problems, and some may have undesirable side effects. Therefore, when searching for climate protection solutions, it is important to weigh up different aspects and perspectives and to tolerate contradictions.

17. Mobilising communication needs a scientific foundation. It is based on findings from a broad spectrum of disciplines in the social and behavioural sciences, humanities and cultural studies, as well as on practical experience.
18. The new climate communication needs to be linked to people's everyday experience and knowledge. People should realise they play a role in deciding on and shaping the transformation. People must learn that their actions matter and have an impact.
19. The new climate communication has to enable people to distinguish fact from fiction. Although disinformation is not a new phenomenon, the technical and legal aspects of the digital environment allow for manipulation on an unprecedented scale, not only in the climate debate. We therefore support the regulation of the digital space so it serves the necessary democratic negotiation processes. We advocate promoting independent fact-checking organisations and improving media literacy.
20. In order for climate policy measures, as well as societal initiatives and social innovations to achieve long-term success, their planners and authors need to take communication aspects into account from the outset: systematically and on an equal footing with technical, legal, political and economic issues.
21. Furthermore, we need institutions with the mandate and resources to support social groups, public institutions and government agencies in their efforts to successfully communicate climate change, to advise them and to conduct impact assessments of public climate communication.
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If you want to co-sign the Graz Charter, [you can do that here](#).