



Climate-change lore and its implications for climate science: Post-science deliberations?



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ABSTRACT

Using of the results of survey questionnaires distributed to climate scientists who focus on the German Baltic coast, regional political decision makers on the German Baltic coast and weather observations from the same region, this paper assesses the existence of developing climate-change lore and the implications for the role of climate science in the science–policy interface. The Oxford Dictionary (1993) provides one definition of lore as ‘A doctrine, a precept; a creed, a religion.’ This is the definition adopted for this paper. The paper concludes that the discrepancies among weather observations, scientific assessments and decision makers’ perceptions suggest that climate-change lore exists, or is coming into existence. The paper then discusses the implications for the science–policy interface and suggests that given current trajectories, science could come to play a secondary role to climate-change lore in regional political decision making concerning climate change. To the truth-to-power model of the science–policy interface and the tenets of post-normal science, three additional possibly evolving science–policy configurations (as pertaining to the climate change issue) are offered.

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1. Introduction

We should not forget Thomas’ Theorum, that it is not important whether or not the interpretation of a situation is correct or not, ‘If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.’ (Thomas & Thomas, 1928:572). In other words, it is the interpretation of the situation that leads to the course of action. The interpretation of climate-change is driven by a number of factors, one of which is lore. This paper suggests that lore, namely climate-change lore, is having an impact on regional political decision makers (hereafter RPDMs) in the German Baltic coastal region. The presence and impact of climate change lore is empirically investigated by the analysis of the results of two survey questionnaires, one of RPDMs and the other of scientists concerned with climate change issues in the same region, and weather observations for the same geographic region.

1.1. Defining lore

The Oxford Dictionary (1993) defines lore as ‘A doctrine, a precept; a creed, a religion.’ Lore includes, among other things, legends, oral history, beliefs and stories. This paper explores the role of climate-change ‘lore’ in the formation of climate change policy in the German Baltic coastal region, and the potential consequences for the science–policy interface.

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Lore survives through repetitive recitations. Traditionally, this would be through the likes of song, poetry or prose. Today, the world of digital technology offers an alternative and much quicker means of dispersion. Lore comes to reflect the collective experience of its adherents, expressing fears, ideals and values. Historically, lore has 'blocked the way for alternate modes of explanation, directions of research and the problems of study, silencing the expressions and the people themselves.' (Ben-Amos, 1983:12).

Bascom (1954:333–349) argued that lore can serve four primary functions in a culture. 'Folklore lets people escape from repressions imposed upon them by society; Folklore validates culture, justifying its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them; Folklore is a pedagogic device which reinforces morals and values and builds wit; Folklore is a means of applying social pressure and exercising social control.' (Dundes, 1965:279–98).

1.2. Traditional knowledge versus lore

Much has been written about the role of traditional knowledge in determining regional adaptation strategies for the perceived impacts of climate change. Little, if any, attention has been given to the role of lore. Even less interest has addressed the personal integration of lore into the mindset of political decision makers (i.e. how do normative judgments influence the individual perceptions of political decision makers?). To that end, it is necessary to distinguish between traditional knowledge and lore. As used in the following discussion of climate-change lore, succinctly, lore simply is, in essence it is knowledge; traditional knowledge *does*, in essence, it is practical knowledge. Lore is epistemic. Traditional knowledge is empirical. In reference to climate change, lore states there is climate change, traditional knowledge informs on how to adapt.

One distinction between traditional knowledge and lore is provided by Dutfield (2003:19): 'Traditional knowledge commonly refers to knowledge associated with the environment rather than knowledge related to, for example, artworks, handicrafts and other cultural works and expressions (which tend to be considered as elements of folklore)'.

Traditional knowledge (or what Johnson 2002 calls, 'traditional environmental knowledge') is 'a body of knowledge built by a group of people through generations of living in close contact with nature. It includes a system of classification, a set of empirical observations about the local environment, and a system of self-management that governs resource use.' Traditional knowledge, unlike lore, has a tendency to be practical and applied knowledge.

Traditional knowledge is a cumulative body of knowledge, know-how, practices and representations maintained and developed by peoples with extended histories of interaction with the natural environment. These sophisticated sets of understandings, interpretations and meanings are part and parcel of a cultural complex that encompasses language, naming and classification systems, resource use practices, ritual, spirituality and worldview. [...] Traditional knowledge provides the basis for local-level decision-making about many fundamental aspects of day-to-day life: hunting, fishing, gathering, agriculture and husbandry; preparation, conservation and distribution of food; location, collection and storage of water; struggles against disease and injury; interpretation of meteorological and climatic phenomena; confection of clothing and tools; construction and maintenance of shelter; orientation and navigation on land and sea; management of ecological relations of society and nature; adaptation to environmental/social change; and so on and so forth.

(Jones, 2002:10–11)

[F]olklore (or traditional and popular culture) is the totality of tradition-based creations of a cultural community, expressed by a group of individuals and recognized as reflecting its cultural and social identity; its standards and values are transmitted orally, by imitation or by other means.

(Johnson, 1992:3–4)

Traditional knowledge shares a close affinity with decisions concerning adaptation to an existing set of conditions. It does not, however, share such a close affinity with the interpretation of the future. The formation of these perceptions is a result of the assessment of climate-change lore and climate-change science. Lore does not typically, or necessarily, include the notion of practice. Consequently, whereas traditional knowledge refers to what is known and what can be done, climate-change lore can be used to address the future. Traditional knowledge is gleaned from past experience, it is learned. Lore, on the other hand, is not confined only to the past and present.

The concept of lore includes, among other things, legends, oral history, beliefs and stories. While weather lore (that has a close affiliation with traditional knowledge and draws from past experience) has been well noted and presented in many almanacs (a red sky at night ...) and employed throughout history to predict weather, only the advent of climate change, offered by science, has provided for the possibility of climate-change lore. Unlike weather lore/traditional knowledge, climate-change lore does not have a history and tradition for validation or a long period of development: there is traditional knowledge pertaining to weather, but no traditional knowledge of global climate change. Traditional knowledge shares a strong affinity to adaptation to real change. Climate-change lore, on the other hand, refers to perceptions of what the future might bring.

Technological change resulting in rapid mass communication has also played a role in the development of climate-change lore. Modern lore is often referred to as an 'urban legend' (Dorson, 1968:166). An urban legend is a narrative that does not address the veracity of the story being told, nor does it necessarily contain practical knowledge. According to

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