

CliFVac: Towards climate friendly vacation practices

Theoretical foundation

Lars Kjerulf Petersen, Department of Environmental Science

Anne Gammelgaard Ballantyne, Department of Business Development and Technology

Jonas Andreassen Lysgaard, School of Education

Aarhus University

DFF project proposal, June 2021

In order to provide an in-depth understanding of a transition towards climate friendly vacation practices, the project draws on and integrates research in environmental sociology, environmental communication and environmental learning. The theoretical foundation is primarily inspired by *practice theory*^{1 2 3} drawing also on the analytical approach of *actor-network theory*⁴. Accordingly, the project reaches beyond an understanding of people's behaviour as a matter of individuals making informed choices, thereby seeking to optimize personal benefit or self-identity. Rather, vacation practices are understood as patterns of action, which are shaped and changed through the interplay between different factors:

- *Meanings*: People's ideals for the good vacation and inherent orientation towards certain favoured destinations, pleasures and events, as these orientations may vary according to social, cultural and national context.
- *Materiality*: This includes infrastructures for different kinds of transport and accommodation and IT infrastructures for booking, as well as destinations' characteristic landscapes, urban spaces, food, weather, risks etc.
- *Embodied competences*: Such as the skills to navigate planning, booking and different transport means, as well as foreign geographies and customs.
- *Regulation*.⁵ E.g., tax exemptions for aviation fuel, or border closings.

Based on this approach, it is our ambition to ***contribute new theoretical and empirical insights*** to research in sustainable vacation practices *and* to the understandings in social/cultural science of *pro-environmental transition processes and how media influence and informal learning are involved in such processes*.

Although this project investigates vacation practices and sustainable transition rather than tourism per se, the field of ***sustainable tourism***, including the issue of tourism ***transport***, is relevant for this project and has been the subject of a considerable body of academic work^{6 7}. It is broadly

acknowledged that tourism and vacation practices are shaped by and changed through the influence of many factors, and that sustainable development in tourism cannot rely on technological innovation alone, but also relies on a range of social influences^{8 9}. Thus, studies have addressed the importance of otherness for the pleasurable tourism experience, i.e. otherness of landscapes, weather, food, culture, etc., and distance is a key factor for achieving this otherness¹⁰. Other studies show how the feeling of happiness as an integral part of the tourist experience is tied to needs for novelty and change, which in turn are tied to increasing distance and the speed that is required to cover it¹¹.

Our project continues and adds to the above-mentioned focus on social influences and their interaction with other factors such as technological and material conditions. In particular, it adds to this research by investigating the *role of media* in the development of new vacation imaginaries and competences and the *processes of informal learning* through which new imaginaries and competences are integrated in social practices.

Thus, our project contributes new insights to the field of ***climate change communication*** and ***media's role*** in pro-environmental practice change. Climate change communication is a research field that engages with the roles of communication in conveying, mediating and constituting climate change as a pertinent issue¹². In this context, publics or citizens are seen as highly relevant due to the significant level of GHG emissions associated with individuals' behaviour¹³. A majority of studies on climate change communication assume a strategic or persuasive approach to mitigation of the climate crisis, aiming to identify effective ways to communicate climate change as a means to evoke behaviour change^{14 15}. Several scholars advocate that emotions might be an important communication tool to engage lay people with climate change and induce pro-environmental behaviour^{16 17}.

Although this research agenda is important, its strategic outlook frequently infers theoretical and methodological positions that assume simplistic, transmission-oriented views of communication¹⁸. Often labelled the 'information deficit model', such mechanistic understandings tend to focus on the role of rational, cognitive abilities of the human mind, neglecting the complex of meanings^{19 20}. However, scholars increasingly argue that there is a need for empirical studies, which acknowledge communication as a constitutive element in complex networks of practices^{21 22 23}.

Adopting practice theory as a theoretical entry point will allow the project to reach beyond information deficit models and understand the broad socio-technical and socio-cultural context into which climate change communication – and indeed media dissemination of vacation and sustainability imaginaries – is integrated. There are only few studies, which from a practice theoretical perspective acknowledge and consider the role of media content in processes of practice change²⁴. However, project leader LKP has developed an original approach, whereby the interaction between media content and practice change is analysed as an actor-network consisting of human actors, items of media content, material objects, and institutional actors²⁵. Meaning content of media texts is analysed

according to the ways in which it connects to people's values and meanings, to their competences, to material conditions, and to governmental regulations. This project contributes to practice theory and climate change communication by illuminating such ties between media content and people's values and meanings, which in turn furthers our understanding of how people's imaginaries and sentiments are formed, learned and maintained in the context of green transitions.

Our project will also contribute new insights regarding the *informal learning* processes through which social practices are developed, and the diverse factors that influence these learning processes²⁶. We analyse transformation of vacation practices – and the imaginaries that inform them – as dynamic learning processes. How do people partaking in specific vacation practices learn about the challenges that these practices entail, and how do they potentially change their part in these practices?²⁷ Through a specific focus on non-formal learning, i.e. social learning in arenas beyond formal education, the project will emphasize and investigate the importance of media influence, friends, family, NGOs and other potential arenas – with respect to the social and cultural context that saturates and is enacted in these non-formal learning arenas²⁸.

Processes of learning and practice change are neither linear nor causal. Research on learning as social processes, developing through different communities of practice, have led to a more nuanced understanding of the multiple factors that reinforce or change patterns of action^{29 30 31}. However, much of the research into non-formal learning has focused on face-to-face interactions in physical and localized settings. There is need for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of learning and change processes that to a large extent are influenced and even directed by factors outside face-to-face interaction, i.e., by publicly mediated conceptions and imaginaries that go beyond the specific scope of what can be experienced by individuals^{32 33}.

To summarize: this project will contribute to current and future research because it:

- Develops a deeper understanding of the imaginaries and sentiments that pervade and inspire vacation desires and planning, and the bearing climate/sustainability concerns may have on these.
- Improves our understanding of the interaction between media narrations (on various platforms) and social practices in processes of sustainable transition.
- Advances our understanding of informal learning processes – through media and in real life interaction – as an integral part of sustainable transition.
- Identifies emergent trends in and preconditions for further integration of green transition perspectives in people's lifeworld.
- Through these contributions advances Danish research in behavioural aspects of green transition, thereby, and contributing project findings to the Danish research environment in this field.

References

- ¹ Reckwitz, Andreas (2002). Toward a theory of social practices: A development in culturalist theorizing. *European journal of social theory*, 5(2): 243-263.
- ² Shove, E., Pantzar, M., & Watson, M. (2012). *The dynamics of social practice: Everyday life and how it changes*. Sage.
- ³ Warde, Alan (2005). Consumption and Theories of Practice. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 5(2): 131-153.
- ⁴ Petersen, Lars Kjerulf (2020): Media's role in pro-environmental practice changes – proposing an ANT perspective. *Environmental Sociology*, 6(1): 42-53.
- ⁵ Gram-Hanssen, Kirsten (2009). Standby Consumption in Households Analyzed with a Practice Theory Approach. *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, 14(1): 150 – 165.
- ⁶ Streimikiene, D., Svagzdiene, B., Jasinskas, E., & Simanavicius, A. (2021). Sustainable tourism development and competitiveness: The systematic literature review. *Sustainable Development*, 29(1): 259-271.
- ⁷ Sørensen, Flemming & Bærenholdt, Jørgen Ole (2020): Tourist practices in the circular economy. *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 85, article 103027.
- ⁸ Cohen, S.A., Higham, J.E.S. & Reis, A.C. (2013): Sociological barriers to developing sustainable discretionary air travel behaviour. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 21(7): 982-998. Luzecka 2016)
- ⁹ Luzecka, P. (2016). “Take a gap year!” A social practice perspective on air travel and potential transitions towards sustainable tourism mobility. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 24(3): 446-462.
- ¹⁰ Larsen, G.R. & Guiver, J. W. (2013): Understanding tourists' perceptions of distance: a key to reducing the environmental impacts of tourism mobility. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 21(7): 968-981.
- ¹¹ Ram, Y., Nawijn, J., & Peeters, P.M. (2013): Happiness and limits to sustainable tourism mobility: a new conceptual model. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 21(7): 1017-1035.
- ¹² Moser S.C. (2016): Reflections of climate change communication research and practice in the 2nd decade of the 21st century: what more is there to say? *WIREs Climate Change*, 7: 345-367.
- ¹³ Whitmarsh L., O'Neill, S. & Lorenzoni, I. (2013): Public engagement with climate change: What do we know and where do we go from here? *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*, 9(1): 7-25.
- ¹⁴ Davis L., Fährnich B., Nepote A.C., Riedlinger, M. & Trench, B. (2018): Environmental Communication and Science Communication – Conversations, Connections and Collaborations. *Environmental Communication*, 12(4): 431-437.

-
- ¹⁵ Wang, S., Corner, A., Chapman, D. & Markowitz, E. (2018): Public engagement with climate imagery in a changing digital landscape. *WIREs Climate Change*, 9.
- ¹⁶ Moser, S.C. (2016) Reflections of climate change communication research and practice in the 2nd decade of the 21st century: what more is there to say? *WIREs Climate Change*, 7: 345-367.
- ¹⁷ Chapman D.A., Lickel, B, & Markowitz (2017): Reassessing emotion in climate change communication. *Nature Climate Change*, 7: 848-852.
- ¹⁸ Ballantyne, Anne Gammelgaard (2016): Communicating Climate Change: What can we learn from communication theory? *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 7(3): 329-344.
- ¹⁹ Hart, P.S. & Nisbet, E.C. (2012): Boomerang effects in science communication: how motivated reasoning and identity cues amplify opinion polarization about climate mitigation policies. *Communication research*, 39(6): 701-723.
- ²⁰ Nabi, R.L., Gustafson, A. and Jensen, R. (2018): Framing climate change. Exploring the role of emotion in generating advocacy behaviour. *Science Communication*, 40(4): 442-468.
- ²¹ Wibeck, V. (2014): Enhancing learning, communication and public engagement about climate change - some lessons from recent literature. *Environmental Education Research*, 20(3): 387-411.
- ²² Ballantyne, Anne Gammelgaard (2016): Communicating Climate Change: What can we learn from communication theory? *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 7(3): 329-344.
- ²³ Cook, B.R. & Overpeck, J.T. (2018) Relationship-building between climate scientists and publics as an alternative to information transfer. *WIREs Climate Change*, 10(2).
- ²⁴ Ferrucci, Martina & Petersen, Lars Kjerulf (2019): Towards a new understanding of information effects on discourses and practices: The role of online newspapers in sustainable household changes. *Interactions: Studies in Communication and Culture*, 10(1-2): 129-146.
- ²⁵ Petersen, Lars Kjerulf (2020): Media's role in pro-environmental practice changes – proposing an ANT perspective. *Environmental Sociology*, 6(1): 42-53.
- ²⁶ Lysgaard, Jonas (2018): *Learning from Bad Practice in Environmental and Sustainability Education*. Palgrave
- ²⁷ Illeris, K. (2018) *Learning, Development and Education: From Learning Theory to education and Practice*. Routledge.
- ²⁸ Lysgaard, Jonas (2018): *Learning from Bad Practice in Environmental and Sustainability Education*. Palgrave.
- ²⁹ Altomonte, S., Logan, B., Feisst, M., Rutherford, P., Wilson, R. (2016) Interactive and situated Learning in Education for sustainability. *International Journal of sustainability in Higher Education*. 17(3).

-
- ³⁰ Nygaard, S. E. (2019): *Sustainability Psychology: In the relation between sustainable living and subjective well-being*. PhD thesis, Aarhus University, Department of Psychology and Behavioural Sciences.
- ³¹ Stevenson, R. B. & Dillon, J. (2010): *Engaging Environmental Education: Learning, Culture and Agency*. Sense publishers.
- ³² UNESCO (2017): *Education for sustainable Development Goals*. Paris:UNESCO
- ³³ Lysgaard, J., Bengtsson, S., Laugesen, M. (2019): *Dark Pedagogy*. Palgrave.