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Between Research and the Audience: Images, Emotions, and Narratives in Communicating Climate Change in Polar Regions

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the communication of scientific research conducted in polar regions, visual and emotional narratives, along with artistic forms of expression, are gaining increasing significance. Photography, illustration, and installation art are no longer just tools to illustrate data—they become languages of their own. By transcending the boundaries of scientific jargon, they help evoke emotional responses and remain memorable. Artistic forms open a space for empathy, sensitivity, and deep personal engagement—elements that are crucial in building public awareness and action for the climate.

Images from polar expeditions—featuring retreating glaciers, signs of human presence, or the fragile beauty of remote ecosystems—illustrate how visual storytelling can strengthen the scientific message and give it a personal, human dimension.

2. REFRAMING SCIENTIFIC COMMUNICATION THROUGH ART AND EMOTION

While scientific data and graphs are essential, they are often insufficient to inspire emotional connection or behavioral change. Visual language—especially when combined with narrative—can significantly amplify cognitive and emotional engagement. Art speaks directly to human emotions, making it a powerful tool to counter apathy, engage wider audiences, and spark dialogue beyond academia.

A notable example of this interdisciplinary approach is the initiative “The Woman Image of the Sea”, organized by the Institute of Oceanology PAS. This competition showcases women’s perspectives on the sea and climate through photography and artistic narratives. The resulting works reflect environmental phenomena through the lens of personal experience and emotion, proving that images—when grounded in scientific context—can serve as effective communication tools, fostering public engagement and resonance.

Science communication benefits from cross-sector collaboration between scientists, educators, artists, and local communities. Exhibitions, workshops, and educational initiatives based on such cooperation translate specialized knowledge into visual metaphors, emotions, and shared concerns. Long-standing initiatives like the “Sopot Science Picnic”, now in its 17th year, offer excellent examples of how interactive exhibitions and online formats can broaden understanding across different age groups and backgrounds.

3. BEYOND DATA: BUILDING TRUST AND DIALOGUE

Equally important is addressing climate skepticism and misinformation, which continue to undermine scientific credibility. This presentation will also highlight the importance of trust-building through open, honest, and empathetic communication. Visual narratives, personal stories, and emotional authenticity can play a crucial role in fostering trust and making science more relatable and inclusive.

In an age of information overload, science must not only inform—it must also inspire. Integrating visual language with scientific knowledge empowers new, more inclusive models of communication that invite dialogue, empathy, and co-creation of meaning. Such approaches enhance the potential for societal mobilization in the face of climate change and highlight the responsibility of the scientific community to communicate polar knowledge in accessible and emotionally resonant ways.

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