"We should no more release an untested communication on the public than an untested drug": A methodology to develop and test education and communication tools for promoting adaptation to climate change

Torsten Grothmann∗1,2, Natalie Glas∗3, Markus Leitner∗3, Andrea Prutsch∗3, and Veronika Wirth∗3

1University of Oldenburg – Germany
2Dr. Grothmann - Research Consulting – Germany
3Environment Agency Austria – Austria

Abstract

Education and communication can play an important role in promoting change and transformation. While many publications include recommendations how to communicate climate change there is lack of studies that empirically test these recommendations. Especially studies that test the ‘success’ of education and communication strategies to promote adaptation to climate change are rare.

To address this lack of knowledge we designed a methodology to develop, test and further improve education and communication tools that promote adaptation to climate change. The methodology includes two main parts: (1) Individual interviews and (2) focus group workshops with representative members of the addressed groups of recipients. The interview procedure is built on current scientific knowledge regarding potential drivers of adaptation behavior and includes measurements of risk perceptions, self-efficacy beliefs, moral beliefs, emotions and other potentially influential factors. Furthermore, the interviews include questions on current adaptation behavior (also used as indicators of knowledge about adaptation options), perceived barriers to adaptation behavior, information needs and trusted information channels and sources (to identify feasible communication channels for adaptation information). Based on results of the interviews education and communication tools can be developed that focus on the identified drivers of adaptation behavior in the addressed groups of recipients. In the focus group workshops these education and communication tools are then presented and evaluated by representative members of the addressed groups of recipients. The focus group workshops are a combination of closed-ended questionnaires filled in individually by the participants (to gather the individual evaluations of the education and communication tools) and open-ended discussions (to gather the collective evaluations and to develop ideas for further improvement of the tools).

We evaluated this methodology for developing and testing education and communication tools that promote adaptation to climate change with two groups of recipients: nurses for
the elderly and kindergarten teachers in Austria. These two groups were selected because they are important for preventing health impacts from increasing heat extremes in particularly vulnerable population groups.

The methodology proved successful in order to develop education and communication formats that have a good potential to actually promote adaptation behavior. For example, by the interviews the lack of support from the relatives for heat-adapted behavior of the elderly could be identified as one major obstacle. Hence, we also developed communication formats addressing the relatives (animation videos and flyer), eliciting emotions of solidarity. First results from the ongoing focus group workshops indicate that the developed education and communication tools already meet well the information needs of the recipients and empower them in preventing health effects from heat extremes.

Title: "We should no more release an untested communication on the public than an untested drug" – cited from Fischhoff, 1987

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