

IASS-Blogpost

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Projekt: A Mindset for the Anthropocene

[Dachzeile]

Fear and trust in UN climate policy at UNFCCC COP27

Qualities of space for addressing the inner dimensions of transformation

Together with several partner organizations ([Christine Wamsler | Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies](#), [Dr. Niko Schöpke — Sustainability and Environmental Governance \(uni-freiburg.de\)](#)) the TranS-Mind research group at the IASS is particularly interested in the question: How can we design (political) spaces that incorporate and embrace the inner dimension of transformation? The inner dimension here refers to the dynamics of people's attitudes, values, beliefs, worldviews and emotions (Ives, Freeths & Fischer 2020; Fraude et al. 2021; Wamsler, 2018; Wamsler & Bristow 2022). These are increasingly recognized as indispensable for shaping individual and societal change (Woiwode et al. 2021) i.e. represent a critical lever for sustainability transformation (Abson et al. 2017; Fischer & Riechers 2019). However, the inner dimensions are usually neither prioritized nor encouraged in political arenas where more conventional forms of dialogue prevail. And yet it has been shown that addressing these dimensions can be of great importance (e.g. Bristow 2019). Therefore, we are particularly interested in creating and designing political space that embraces the inner dimensions, i.e. in conscious reflections and dialogues. In this way, we want to explore the implications on the culture of communication as well as the (un)conscious dynamics among participants for change.

The 27th UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP27) in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, serves as a highly relevant and complex case to explore the relationship between political structures, the culture of communication and the inner dimensions of transformation. UNFCCC COPs with their widespread participation of people from multiple organizations, backgrounds and countries is supposed to function as a crystallization hub for international and collective agency to address the pressing climate crisis. Simultaneously, pressure on COP participants to successfully address climate crisis is paramounting, including experiences of discomfort, conflict and climate related fears. Studies have shown that the communication culture prevailing in previous COPs has been perceived as not conducive to the work of all COP participants and that stakeholders often experience phenomena of separation and

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disconnection from self and others (Wamsler et al. 2020; Schroeder et al., in review). Rather than giving participants a sense of agency and facilitating collective action, the communication culture tend to foster a sense of frustration and separated efforts of too slow success.

We decide to pick two highly relevant aspects allowing to interrelate the inner dimensions, political spaces and the culture and practices of communication: trust and fear. Trust is an important driver to build collective agency. At present, however, distrust particularly towards political institutions, structures and processes is prevailing, forming a key barrier (Schroeder et al., in review). Exchange on (dis)trust was however extremely rare at UNFCCC COPs otherwise comprehensive programs. This raises the question of how we can explicitly address the issue of trust in conversation. Simultaneously, so-called climate fear is on the rise not only among young people (Hickmann et al. 2021), and can function both as a catalyst as well as a barrier to climate related action (van Bronswijk 2022). However, policy makers this far focus on dealing with the increasing impacts of fears and not to make it explicit (Wamsler & Bristow 2022). But what happens when we address the issue of fear consciously? And how to do this well? Our goal is thus to create safe spaces for deeper and authentic communication about the climate crisis, where both emotional states - fear and trust - can be addressed.

To this end, the Co-Creative Reflection and Dialogue Space (CCRDS) has been initiated in recent years to bridge this gap between addressing inner capacities and driving individual and collective action. A space where new reflection and communication skills are emphasized and where we can further develop and synthesize design principles such as toolsets, skillsets and mindsets (Fraude et al. 2021). The CCRDS serves as an opportunity to explore and investigate these potentials for transformative climate communication. This year in Egypt, at COP27, a CCRDS will again provide space for diverse sessions with the specific research theme of fear and trust, two relevant but hardly addressed dynamics at UNFCCC meetings. By focusing on these, we address the inner dimension of transformation in UN climate policy.

We thus aim to design sessions and explore qualities of a co-creative reflection and dialogue space by asking: How can we design (political) spaces that incorporate and embrace the inner dimension of transformation? To achieve our goal, we first want to further develop design principles related to toolsets, skillsets and mindsets (Fraude et al. 2021) by experimenting with the inclusion of emotions and feelings, i.e. fear and trust, in political dialogues. Secondly, we want to understand how these design principles can bring about transformative change in the perception of the participants and the collective. Finally, we ask to what extent these experiences can be a resource for engagement of those who participate and the communication culture at COP27 in general.

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[Call for Proposals](#)

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