

Confidential and Anonymous evaluation of
Hans von Storch, “The role of history in and for climate science: Social context and oral accounts,” manuscript hgss-2023-6

Hans von Storch is a distinguished climate scientist and commentator on history and social process. He has interviewed a number of scientists in this field and, in this manuscript, provides links to these interviews along with very brief comments on changes in social context as climate policy rose to prominence.

The strengths of the manuscript lie in the access it provides to archived interviews of prominent climate scientists and to surveys (with Dennis Bray) of professionals in the field. Also of great value is the reminder that climate science has invested too little in the history of ideas.

Beyond the history of ideas, social and cultural history matter, perhaps more. Humans are, and always have been, embedded in the climate system. Climate change is not at all new. Elite and popular ideas, concerns, accommodations, and interventions are woven into the fabric of human history, from the Pleistocene to the “Anthropocene.” It is true that recent environmental problems have been brought to public notice by scientists and engineers, but the perennial problems, exacerbated now, belong to us all.

First of all, the author should consider a new title for the piece. “The role of history in and for climate science: Social context and oral accounts,” promises, but does not explain the role of history. Few, if any historians are cited, and there are no substantial examples or case studies. An outline of the changing Zeitgeist illustrated by scientific and societal turning points would be quite illuminating.

This could be accomplished by summarizing the findings of the interviews and surveys conducted with Dennis Bray, and also summarizing, with analysis, the interviews conducted by Hans von Storch. Perhaps the focus could be what the interviewees said about professional vs. popular approaches to climate and climate change. Such interpretive material from the author would go a long way toward helping the reader “understand climate research and the relationship between climate research and public [apprehensions?] in a historical context.”

I then recommend reworking the existing section 3 by greatly condensing it into a list of reference links to the interviews.

Hans von Storch has recently completed a forthcoming book with his colleague, sociologist Nico Stehr, titled *Science in Society: Climate Change and Climate Policies* (World Scientific, April 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1142/q0399>. Here the authors address the subject of “moving science into society” in the face of economic, political, and cultural constraints.

Since science is a social activity (not a one-way street) that is practiced by scientists (and groups of scientists) with economic, political, and cultural interests, this task is not a straightforward or simple. In fact, over the past three decades, climate science — as practiced by professionally trained climatologists and oceanographers — has taken a back seat to widespread popular anxieties about climate change — portrayed as unprecedented and existential emergencies by

pundits and politicians. Perhaps a summary of results from this book would strengthen the article.

In my opinion, this hgss manuscript would be greatly improved by attention to these themes.