

Rethinking Climate Action, recognise plurality: Insights from Social Science, Humanities, and Arts Researchers

October 2024



POLICY BRIEF



THE INITIATIVE

This policy brief is an initiative by the [COST Action SHiFT](#) (Social Sciences and Humanities for Transformation and Climate Resilience). The writing process was led by Diogo Guedes Vidal (Centre for Functional Ecology—Science for People & the Planet, University of Coimbra; Department of Social Sciences and Management, Universidade Aberta) and Fátima Alves (Centre for Functional Ecology—Science for People & the Planet, University of Coimbra; Department of Social Sciences and Management, Universidade Aberta).

PURPOSE WRITING OF THE POLICY BRIEF

This policy brief "Enhancing Climate Resilience through Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts: A Strategic Framework for Action" is informed by a survey to understand the perceptions of climate-engaged researchers - dedicated to addressing climate change and sustainable development - from various disciplines within the social sciences, humanities, and arts (SSH&A) and highlights critical perceptions, barriers, and opportunities that can inform future climate action strategies within the European Commission's framework.

The writing process was supported by Maria Fernanda Rollo (NOVA – University of Lisbon).

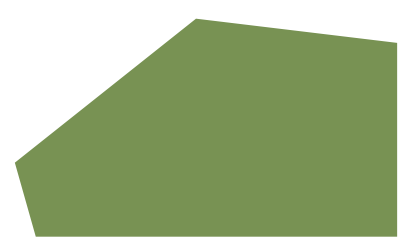


TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	4
2. Scope of the Policy Brief.....	4
3. Diverse Climate Perceptions and Resilience Strategies: Unveiling Plurality	5
4. Key recommendations	6
5. Summary	8
6. References.....	9
7. Disclaimer.....	10

1. Introduction

It is commonly acknowledged that one of the most critical issues of our day is climate change, necessitating swift and extensive action from all facets of society. In order to effectively address the numerous repercussions of this global challenge, which intertwines environmental, sociocultural, economic, and political components, a multidisciplinary strategy is required [1], [2]. In this regard, the SHiFT project has launched a survey into how the arts, humanities, and social sciences might aid in comprehending and mitigating climate change. This policy brief aims to understand how climate-engaged researchers in the SHiFT community perceive climate change, what opportunities and obstacles exist for acting, and how successful communication tactics can promote climate resilience. The policy brief is based on a qualitative analysis of survey data from these researchers.

The study highlighted the need for customised and nuanced approaches to climate change by revealing a variety of viewpoints among respondents. Significant obstacles were also brought to light, including the difficulties caused by false information and ambiguous communication in the public sphere and the belief that present initiatives by businesses, governments, and civil society organisations are insufficient [3]. Significantly, the results highlighted how important it is for the social sciences, humanities, and arts to shape effective responses to climate change through interdisciplinary collaboration that fosters ethical considerations, public engagement, and policy decision-making [4].

2. Scope of the Policy Brief

The primary focus of this policy brief is the qualitative information obtained from a survey given to climate change researchers connected to

the SHiFT initiative. The survey investigates how members of the SHiFT community perceive climate change, their opinions on the efficacy of various climate actions, and their perspectives on communication strategies for fostering climate resilience. Comprehending attitudes and behaviours related to climate change is a component of a more significant endeavour. Through this, we may formulate more all-encompassing approaches to strengthen climate resilience and promote a fair and sustainable future through the various perspectives on climate change held by scholars and utilising the distinct input of social sciences, humanities, and arts.

This policy brief aims to:

- Analyse the perspectives held by researchers in the SHiFT community regarding the origins, consequences, and hazards linked to climate change. This entails determining knowledge gaps and places in which additional instruction and dialogue are required to improve comprehension;
- Emphasise the obstacles that experts believe stand in the way of successful climate action, including systemic constraints, scepticism about the personal impact, and the lack of adequate integration of climate education into official curricula. Additionally, it points out ways to improve climate resilience through coordinated actions, inclusive laws, and heightened public involvement;
- Evaluate the success of the present communication strategies and the media's influence on the public's perception of and reaction to climate change. This entails tackling the problems of false information, sensationalism in the media, and the requirement for objective, fair, and solution-focused communication. References to relevant scientific studies support this brief and reports to strengthen its recommendations;

- Emphasise how important it is for the social sciences, humanities, and arts to support a thorough understanding of climate change, to influence ethical decisions, and to increase public participation. It looks at how these fields may support multidisciplinary cooperation, provide evidence-based policy, and consider various cultural viewpoints when tackling climate-related issues.

3. Diverse Climate Perceptions and Resilience Strategies: Unveiling Plurality

The main clues from the survey of the SHiFT community's climate-engaged scholars offer insightful information about how they see climate change, what stands in the way of taking meaningful action, and how multidisciplinary approaches and communication may promote climate resilience.

Scholars comprehensively comprehend climate change, acknowledging it as a worldwide concern with complex environmental, social, and economic interrelationships. Although everyone agrees that action must be taken immediately, opinions on climate change's grave and immediate effects differ significantly. The respondents mentioned natural and human reasons, focusing on how human activities—such as the use of fossil fuels, deforestation, and industrial processes—contribute to the acceleration of climate change. This disparity in comprehension highlights the significance of customised education and communication strategies that appeal to various groups [5].

According to the poll, several obstacles are in the way of effective climate action, such as doubts about the effectiveness of individual initiatives, perceptions of the shortcomings of industry and government responses, and structural constraints

such as a lack of financing and policy support. Respondents identified two notable challenges: inadequate inclusion of climate change education in official curricula and low public awareness. However, the poll also shows how inclusive policies, cooperative efforts, and more funding for sustainability projects—like boosting transdisciplinary approaches and community engagement—can help build climate resilience [6].

Concerns over the current status of climate change communication were voiced by most respondents, who described it as frequently "diffuse," "unclear," or "too dramatic." In fact, Mendonça et al. [3] highlighted the necessity of communicating in a way that is more fact-based, solution-focused, and free of sensationalism in order to counteract disinformation effectively. The respondents emphasised the significance of environmental education and the media's role in empowering the people and increasing knowledge, who also pushed for more upbeat, captivating storylines that highlight workable solutions and encourage group action [7].

The survey emphasises how important it is for the social sciences, humanities, and arts to comprehend and combat climate change. According to Stone-Jovicich et al. [8], these fields are crucial for investigating human behaviour, cultural dynamics, and ethical issues since they help to shape effective communication tactics and encourage public engagement. In order to inform policy decisions and promote sustainable behaviours, respondents emphasised the necessity for multidisciplinary collaboration, the integration of multiple viewpoints, and a clearer understanding of the transformative potential of these sectors.

Also, emotions greatly influence how people think about and respond to climate change. A variety of emotional reactions, such as anxiety, rage, motivation, and overload, were indicated by respondents. These reactions can either support or

impede climate action [9]. According to the research, encouraging positive emotional reactions via storytelling, open communication, and community involvement can inspire action and advance climate resilience.

4. Key recommendations

Drawing from the qualitative data obtained from the survey of researchers involved in climate change within the SHiFT community, some crucial suggestions are put forth to improve climate resilience via interdisciplinary cooperation, efficient communication, and inclusive policy strategies:

- **Increase public funding for climate resilience-focused studies and initiatives in the humanities, social sciences, and arts.** Multidisciplinary partnerships and creative strategies that integrate social, ethical, and cultural viewpoints into climate policies and practices ought to be given priority when it comes to funding;
- **To provide creative ideas and effective communication tactics, promote collaborations between social scientists, scientists, artists, and politicians.** Interdisciplinary collaboration can facilitate the integration of multiple kinds of information, close gaps between scientific and lay viewpoints, and promote holistic approaches to climate change;
- **Provide curricula for all educational levels, from elementary schools to higher education, that cover topics connected to climate change from the perspectives of the social sciences, humanities, and arts.** In addition to encouraging critical thinking and a personal commitment to sustainability, this

will assist in cultivating a better awareness of climate change;

- **Use strategies that emphasise factual and solution-focused messages to counteract sensationalism and false information.** Create public awareness campaigns that transmit complicated climate issues in an approachable and engaging way through narrative, visual arts, and other creative expressions.
- **Acknowledge how emotions influence how people perceive and react to climate change. Create tactics that elicit happy feelings, like telling success stories, acknowledging achievements, and encouraging civic and political involvement.** This strategy can support the development of a shared sense of purpose and drive to act on climate change.
- **Strategies for resilience and climate adaptation should incorporate indigenous knowledge and cultural legacy.** Recognise the importance of local knowledge and a range of cultural views in guiding policy choices and creating inclusive strategies for addressing climate change);
- **Encourage community participation in planning for climate resilience to guarantee that different perspectives are heard and considered during decision-making.** Encourage community empowerment by co-creating solutions and social innovation by facilitating public discourse, participatory efforts, and collaborative platforms;
- **Promote cutting-edge communication techniques to spread awareness about climate change and motivate group action, such as digital storytelling, theatre, and public art.** These innovative

methods raise awareness of climate issues.

5. Summary

The qualitative findings from a survey of climate-engaged researchers in the SHiFT community are highlighted in this policy brief. The survey focused on the researchers' perspectives on climate change, obstacles to taking meaningful action, and the contributions of communication, social sciences, the arts, and the humanities to building climate resilience. The results show that respondents had varying perspectives on climate change, highlighting the complexity of the problem and the need for specialised approaches that consider the many viewpoints, knowledge gaps, and emotional reactions involved.

The problems provided by misinformation and poor communication, doubts about the personal effects of climate change, and insufficient industrial and governmental initiatives were all noted as barriers to effective climate action. Nonetheless, there are chances to promote climate resilience via increased public involvement, inclusive policies, and interdisciplinary collaboration, all supported by effective communication tactics and funding for the humanities, social sciences, and arts.

The poll also emphasises how critical incorporating cultural viewpoints and emotional reactions into climate initiatives is. Emotions, including motivation, worry, and rage, significantly shape public opinions and actions. In order to solve climate concerns, effective communication that uses positive emotions, narrative, and artistic expressions can inspire group action and foster a sense of purpose.

The policy brief suggests boosting public funding for the humanities, social sciences, and arts, encouraging interdisciplinary partnerships, improving climate education at all levels, and creating creative communication tactics to create a more resilient and sustainable future.

Developing inclusive and successful climate policy also requires an appreciation of the importance of indigenous knowledge, cultural heritage, and community involvement

6. REFERENCES

- [1] S. M. Amolegbe *et al.*, “Adapting to Climate Change: Leveraging Systems-Focused Multidisciplinary Research to Promote Resilience,” *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, vol. 19, no. 22, 2022, doi: 10.3390/ijerph192214674.
- [2] D. G. Vidal *et al.*, “Thinking Beyond Borders: How Can Humanities and Social Sciences Help to Deal with Climate Change Health Hazards in the Twenty-First Century? Outputs of the Transdisciplinary Network ‘Composing Worlds: Humanities, Well-being and Health in the 21st century,’” in *Climate Change and Health Hazards: Addressing Hazards to Human and Environmental Health from a Changing Climate*, W. Leal Filho, D. G. Vidal, and M. A. P. Dinis, Eds. Cham: Springer, 2023, pp. 3–24. doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-26592-1_1.
- [3] A. M. B. Mendonça, W. Leal Filho, and F. Alves, “Written Press’s Approach to Climate Change in the Autonomous Region of Madeira and the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands,” in *Climate Change Strategies: Handling the Challenges of Adapting to a Changing Climate*, vol. Part F5, W. Leal Filho, M. Kovaleva, F. Alves, and I. R. Abubakar, Eds. Cham: Springer, 2023, pp. 459–474. doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-28728-2_22.
- [4] P. Holm and V. Winiwarter, “Climate change studies and the human sciences,” *Glob. Planet. Change*, vol. 156, pp. 115–122, 2017, doi: 10.1016/j.gloplacha.2017.05.006.
- [5] J. Reis and R. C. Ballinger, “Creating a climate for learning-experiences of educating existing and future decision-makers about climate change,” *Mar. Policy*, vol. 111, 2020, doi: 10.1016/j.marpol.2018.07.007.
- [6] E. Daniels, S. Bharwani, Å. Gerger Swartling, G. Vulturius, and K. Brandon, “Refocusing the climate services lens: Introducing a framework for co-designing ‘transdisciplinary knowledge integration processes’ to build climate resilience,” *Clim. Serv.*, vol. 19, 2020, doi: 10.1016/j.cliser.2020.100181.
- [7] E. Brookes *et al.*, “Learning from Arts and Humanities Approaches to Building Climate Resilience in the UK,” in *Quantifying Climate Risk and Building Resilience in the UK*, S. Dessai, K. Lonsdale, J. Lowe, and R. Harcourt, Eds. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2024, pp. 75–89. doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-39729-5_6.
- [8] S. Stone-Jovicich, B. E. Goldstein, K. Brown, R. Plummer, and P. Olsson, “Expanding the contribution of the social sciences to social-ecological resilience research,” *Ecol. Soc.*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2018, doi: 10.5751/es-10008-230141.
- [9] T. Brosch, “Affect and emotions as drivers of climate change perception and action: a review,” *Curr. Opin. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 42, pp. 15–21, 2021, doi: 10.1016/j.cobeha.2021.02.001.

DISCLAIMER

This policy brief is intended as a basis for discussion. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the material in this report, the authors will not be liable for any loss or damage incurred through the use of this publication.

This article/publication is based upon work from COST Action SHiFT - Social Sciences and Humanities for Transformation and Climate Resilience, CA21166, supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

www.shift-cost.eu

COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is a funding agency for research and innovation networks. Our Actions help connect research initiatives across Europe and enable scientists to grow their ideas by sharing them with their peers. This boosts their research, career and innovation.

www.cost.eu

