

Abstract for the General Public

As the world continues to warm, climate fiction is becoming one of the hottest literary genres. Novels such as Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future*, Richard Powers' *The Overstory*, and Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* are achieving bestseller status and being widely discussed by critics, activists, and scholars. Some of them claim that cli-fi, as it is often called, is not only fascinating and topically relevant but could even 'save the planet.' The underlying theory is that climate change cannot be addressed without influencing the attitudes, beliefs, and behavior of the public, and that, thanks to its aesthetic qualities and the imaginative freedom it allows its authors, cli-fi can do that more effectively than most other forms of communication.

The problem with this theory is that there is little empirical evidence to support it. As a result, we do not know how strong the persuasive effects of climate fiction (or cli-fi) might be, which types of cli-fi are the most persuasive for which audiences, and whether there might be any unintended negative effects of using cli-fi as a form of persuasion. The aim of this project is to address that gap. To this end, it will combine methods and theoretical frameworks drawn from the humanities and social sciences – ecocriticism, literary theory, postcolonial, and decolonial theory, environmental communication, psychology, and the empirical study of literature. The result of this convergence of methods and theories will be a series of 14 empirical studies – 2 correlational, 12 experimental – investigating the psychological and demographic profiles of cli-fi readers, and how different kinds of cli-fi can affect attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. We will evaluate whether cli-fi can make people take climate change more seriously, empower them to take action, and increase their concern for its victims. In short, we will evaluate whether it can contribute to fighting the climate crisis, and how it might do so more effectively.

The evidence obtained through our studies will be of both scholarly and practical value. It will allow for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the social role of climate fiction, thereby contributing significantly to ecocriticism, environmental communication, and environmental psychology. The obtained evidence will also make an important contribution to the empirical study of literature and communication studies as such, both through the unprecedented scale and scope of the project, involving over 22 000 participants from three different continents, and by shedding light on various general aspects of literary communication that have been empirically understudied thus far. Finally, it will be of practical value, providing critical information to authors, editors, publishers, policymakers, activists, and teachers, all of whom have a stake in creative modes of climate communication.