

Images of Climate Change in Major International Photographic Competitions: An Example of a Multiple Case Study Methodology

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, the society has become increasingly aware of the importance of climate change. The media in general have made a decisive contribution to this. Particularly decisive has been the diffusion of images on the impacts of climate change. This chapter analyzes the images on this issue present in the latest editions of the main world photographic competitions (multiple case study), such as World Press Photo, Sony World Photography Awards, or Pulitzer Prizes, with the aim of making a visual review of the subject, as well as to try to establish a thematic typology of the images and to determine if there has been any evolution in recent times. The images found show that the subject matter is diverse and that there is a certain evolution from shocking and striking images of impacts to other more complex ones in which more elements and new themes, sometimes not so obvious, are included.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all member states of the United Nations in 2015, which “provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and planet, now and in the future...”, with one of the main objectives of “...tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests” (United Nations, 2021), it is necessary to investigate on the importance that images have been gaining denouncing climate change and trying to continue raising human awareness about climate change. Thus, in recent years, the society has become increasingly aware

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of the importance of climate change. The media in general have made a decisive contribution to this. Particularly decisive has been the diffusion of images on the impacts of climate change, through traditional media such as television (Fernández-Reyes et al., 2018), but also through other media or channels, such as stock photography websites (Trabadela-Robles et al., 2021) or social media (Cea et al. 2021).

This work analyses the images on this theme being present in the latest editions of the main world photographic competitions (multiple case studies), such as the World Press Photo, the Sony World Photography Awards or the Pulitzer Prizes, with the aim of making a visual review of the subject, as well as to try to establish a thematic typology of the images and to determine if there has been any evolution in recent times.

In a previous exploratory study, the images found show that the subject matter is diverse and that there seems to be a certain evolution from flashy and striking images of climate change impacts to more complex ones in which more elements and new (sometimes not so obvious) themes are included. This work includes significant illustrative images to show what it has been researched.

As discussed later in this paper, it can also be observed that the competitions themselves have taken an active stance in this respect, so they have included in their typologies and competition categories some specific environmental theme/s and, therefore, seek to show and denounce situations related to the bad practices of human beings and their consequences in relation to climate change.

Given that awareness of the environment and the need to act against climate change has fortunately continued to grow in recent years, it is considered that this work is necessary, and it might be of interest to all kinds of audiences.

BACKGROUND

Climate Change Awareness

Currently climate change is understood, and it has been recognized that action to mitigate it must be taken, but this has not always been the case. In fact, even today, there are many people who, although they have heard certain concepts such as “climate change”, “global warming”, “greenhouse effect” or simpler terms such as “deforestation” or “desertification”, do not really know what each of these concepts means.

Although sometimes this lack of interest in everything related to climate change has been blamed on a lack of literacy in the public and in some cases, it has been so (Weber & Stern, 2011), however, it has been shown that this is not entirely accurate (Kahan et al., 2012), but that it also related to the individual personal attitude and can even be blamed on the individual’s capacity to adapt to this phenomenon (Grothmann & Patt, 2005).

It has also been seen as a handicap for awareness that governments do not know how to explain the challenge to their citizens (Lorenzoni et al., 2007).

In any case, human perception of the obvious risk posed by climate change is growing, especially if citizens have had any negative personal experiences related to adverse natural phenomena associated with climate change (Fronzel et al., 2017).

The increased perception of the problem has also been aided by the media (Boykoff, 2011), whether traditional media such as newspapers (Sampei & Aoyagi-Usui, 2009; Schmidt et al., 2017) or digital media such as social media (Mavrodieva et al., 2019).

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