

The desire for climate control: a study of its cultural, historical and political dimensions

The most recent G8 Summit in Italy in July 2009 endorsed the idea that stabilising the world's temperature at no greater than 2C above the mid-19C level should form a guiding principle for international climate policy negotiations. These negotiations (most recently at COP15 at Copenhagen) continue to gather together an ever wider range of political actors and interests, from religious institutions to aboriginal peoples to new social movements. And new impetus has recently been given to the notion of climate engineering, the deployment of large-scale invasive technologies which can deliberately manipulate global temperature through modifying solar radiation. The desire for (global) climate control is seemingly growing wider and deeper.

Yet this sought-for human control over climate and weather has a long history (Fleming, 2010), emerging and re-emerging in different places, in different cultures and at different times. The desire for control over the climate is closely linked to the idea of climate utopia, the hope that physical climates (on different geographic scales) could be fashioned so as to match the needs and desires of the human imagination (Porter & Lukermann, 1975; Meyer, 2002).

The rising prominence of the idea of climate control – that it is both needed and possible – warrants careful investigation into its underlying appeal. Is the call to bring global climate under human management (as in new technological forms of solar radiation management) driven by ecological fears, by an exercise of political power or by a display of technological mastery? How is the current manifestation of the desire for climate control related to the discourse and ideologies of previous eras and of different cultures? What is signified by the human quest for a 'stable' climate with its promise of pacifying anxiety and fear and avoiding 'climate chaos' (Hulme, 2008a)?

This PhD project undertakes a study of the historical, cultural, social and political dimensions of this human desire for climate control. It draws upon the theories and methods of environmental history and historical geography to examine and explain this phenomenon. A number of different lines of investigation may be pursued: an historical survey of writings about climate utopias and control; an analysis of contemporary discourses around climate control (using media content analysis); an exploration of public attitudes to climate control using questionnaires and focus groups. Some cross-cultural work could be envisaged. The results from the study will allow contemporary debates about climate control to be placed into much wider contexts, revealing different interests and ideologies at work. They will be of interest to environmental organisations and movements and to other political climate change actors. The project would suit students from geography, environmental history, anthropology or related social science disciplines.

References and Reading:

- Fleming, J.R. (2010) **Fixing the sky: the checkered history of weather and climate control** Columbia University Press
- Hulme, M. (2008a) The conquering of climate: discourses of fear and their dissolution **The Geographical Journal** 174(1), 5-16
- Hulme, M. (2008b) Geographical work at the boundaries of climate change **Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers** 33(1), 5-11.
- Hulme, M. (2009) **Why we disagree about climate change: understanding controversy, inaction and opportunity** Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 393pp.
- Meyer, W.B. (2002) The perfectionists and the weather: the Oneida Community's quest for meteorological utopia 1848-1879 **Environmental History** 7(4), 589-610
- Porter, P.W. and Lukermann, F.E. (1975) The geography of utopia in, **Geographies of the mind: essays in historical geosophy in honour of John Kirtland Wright** (eds.) Lowenthal, D. and Bowden, M.J., Oxford University Press, New York NY, 268pp.