

## Methodological Cosmopolitanism – In the Laboratory of Climate Change<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Climate change, framed in social scientific terms, offers a causal and moral narrative which connects, for example, users of electric toothbrushes in the USA and couples quarrelling about habits of consumption in Europe and Japan, with representatives disputing about a post-Kyoto agreement at global climate conferences, all the way to victims of flooding and draught events in Australia, China, India and Bangladesh. Even climate sceptics react to and thereby affirm the dominance of such a climate narrative. This coercive inclusion of the excluded ›distant other‹ is what I define as the social scientific fact of ›cosmopolitization‹ – in distinction from ›cosmopolitanism‹ as a philosophical norm.

By taking climate change as a comprehensive case study experiment, this research project aims at reinventing the social sciences for the ›age of cosmopolitization‹. The ground-breaking nature of the project is to advance the present state of debate by validating the new theoretical, methodological and empirical tools needed for such a ›cosmopolitan turn‹.

Since their inception in the late 19th century, the social sciences remain caught in a resilient methodological nationalism bound up with the presupposition that the national-territorial remains the primary container for the analysis of social, economic, political and cultural processes. Methodologi-

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cal nationalism is built into the basic concepts of modern sociology and political science, as well as into routines of data collection and analysis. Building on my previous work on methodological cosmopolitanism, this project undertakes a full-scale cosmopolitan case study of climate change, thereby rendering operative a new mode of transnational research cooperation, data generation, and theory validation. This is to be done in two work packages. Work package one: cosmopolitan climate change (three comprehensive case study components 1) greening world cities; 2) low-carbon innovation networks; 3) mediating global risks); work package two: cosmopolitan theory development: turning the case study components into a distinctive process of (re-)structuring methodological cosmopolitanism.

Working iteratively between theoretical reflection and empirical investigation, this approach promises to generate new knowledge on a pressing real-world problem (i.e. climate change), while at the same time elaborating and testing a model renewing the social sciences for the ›age of cosmopolitanization‹.

## 1. State-of-the-art: the cosmopolitan turn in social theory

In the present period of ›world risk society‹ (e.g. Beck 2009) it has become a commonplace that national institutions alone are unable to cope with the comprehensive challenges of responding to new global risks of terrorism, financial instability, and ecological crisis. In the spatial dimension, we are confronted with risks that disregard the borders of the nation-state; climate change, notably, affects everyone around the globe, even if not to the same degree. Similarly, the long latency period of many contemporary problems – such as the long-term effects of nuclear radiation – escape traditional routines of risk management. Further, in the social dimension, the attribution of responsibility and legal liability for potential threats has become more problematic than ever. Given complex patterns of interconnectedness, who ›causes‹ climate change or financial crisis proves extremely controversial questions.

In light of such epochal transformations, this project asserts the necessity of making social and political theory generally more attentive to global interconnections and less limited to the presumptions of nation-states (Beck 2006; Beck, Grande 2010). My aim is to explore and validate the

theoretical, methodical and empirical tools required for a paradigm shift – from ›methodological nationalism‹ to ›methodological cosmopolitanism‹ – to take hold in the social sciences. This ›cosmopolitan turn‹, I assert, will provide the social sciences with adequate tools to study 21st century global challenges. In order to advance the present state of debate, I adopt the high-stake issue of climate change as a comprehensive case study ›laboratory‹, exploring socio-political responses in Europe and East Asia.

Methodological cosmopolitanism opens up a new phase of ›globalization‹ research by engaging the *epistemological challenge* posed to social theory by increasing global interconnectedness. Since their inception in the late 19th century, the social sciences remain caught in a resilient *methodological nationalism* bound up with the presupposition that *national* society constitutes the ›natural‹ socio-political form of the modern world. Methodological nationalism is built into both the basic concepts of social theory and the routines of data collection. Developing an innovative alternative of *methodological cosmopolitanism* is going to require a sea-change at all levels of social science thinking and practice.

Some building blocks for the cosmopolitan turn already exist in growing social science discussions on ›cosmopolitanism‹. Yet such discussions have tended to blur the key distinction between cosmopolitanism, taken in a *normative philosophical* sense, and cosmopolitization, understood as a *descriptive social-scientific* concept. Cosmopolitization captures increasing interdependency of people, groups, and institutions across the globe by pointing to the fact that ›the global other‹ is in our midst. Whereas *cosmopolitanism* may be dismissed as an elitist position of the dominant mobile classes (e.g. Calhoun 2002), cosmopolitization mostly unfolds as an unintended, unseen, and ›coercive‹ social force beneath the surface of persisting national spaces and jurisdictions. This project sets out to better understand the ›force‹ of cosmopolitization and its attendant socio-political transformations.

#### Aims and objectives

Building on my previous work on methodological cosmopolitanism (e.g. Beck 2006; Beck, Sznaider 2006; Beck, Grande 2010), the aim of this research project is to elaborate and validate the cosmopolitan turn in the social sciences by way of three successive moves:

In the *first move*, I set forth the ›problématique‹ of methodological cosmopolitanism, raising basic questions to all levels of social science thinking and practice (section 2). In the *second move*, I focus on climate change as a paradigmatic issue epitomizing our historically novel situation of worldwide entangled modernities that threaten their own foundations (section 3a). In the *third move*, I bring empirical and theoretical observations together in iterative fashion, in order to learn from the ›laboratory‹ of climate change and engage in further theoretical and methodological refinement and restructuring of methodological cosmopolitanism (section 3b).

## 2. Methodology:

### The basic challenges of methodological cosmopolitanism

Methodological cosmopolitanism, as noted, involves challenges to all levels of social research: to theory, in terms of conceptualizing the social forces and effects of cosmopolitization; to comparative methods, in terms of specifying new units of research beyond and below the nation; to data generation, in terms of novel transnational forms of research organization; and to normative self-reflection, in terms of thinking through questions of cosmopolitical agency. By studying the political, economic, and socio-cultural dynamics of climate change, this research project will work simultaneously on all four dimensions, thereby generating the tools needed for a cosmopolitan social science. Working iteratively between theoretical reflection and empirical investigation, this approach promises to generate new knowledge on a pressing real-world problem (i.e. climate change), while at the same time elaborating and testing a general model for renewing the social sciences in the age of cosmopolitization.

#### 2a. Theory: varieties of cosmopolitization in world risk society

To counter the strong tendencies of Euro-centrism in social theory, this research project starts from the assumption – to be empirically substantiated via cross-regional comparative work in Europe and East Asia – that ›world risk society‹ is *not* everywhere the same (e.g. Han, Shim 2010). In this sense, methodological cosmopolitanism will have to take into account

different *varieties* of cosmopolitization in second modernity (e.g. Wagner 2008). This highlights that cosmopolitization does not imply global homogenization but rather the intermingling of convergences *and* divergences, integration *and* conflict, cosmopolitan solidarities *and* re-nationalizations. The question is: how can social theory and its key terms – power, inequality, community etc. – be transformed into a new conceptual architecture of cosmopolitan social theory which takes into account the different paths, experiences, and mixtures of pre-modern, first, and second modernization processes shaping responses to contemporary global risks?

#### 2b. Comparative methods: new units of research

In the era of methodological nationalism, the nation-state provided the all-embracing ›container‹ for studying socio-political processes and structures, both in the social sciences and in dominant forms of political reflection. With the turn to methodological cosmopolitanism, however, new reference points for social analysis will have to be defined, capable of anchoring new comparative knowledge on the many dimensions of cosmopolitization. Even though the ›cosmopolitized nation‹ will remain a legitimate research focus, the question thus becomes: how can we find and define new research units *beyond* methodological nationalism which will allow us to understand processes of cosmopolitization and compare varieties of second modernization processes around the world?

#### 2c. Empirical data: transnational research organization

As noted, methodological nationalism is built into standard routines of data collection and analysis in the social sciences; and this holds true for quantitative statistical procedures as well as for qualitative ethnographic work. The question is: how best to organize a new set of cosmopolitan data collaboration, allowing us to research socio-political transformations on the world scale, in accordance with standards of social science rigour? For the empirical studies, data generation will be carefully organized in dialogical processes of mutual coordination and calibration, in ways that will ensure comparable outcomes across European and East Asian con-

texts. This will be done using both qualitative and quantitative methods, according to the specific unit of empirical analysis. Hence, depending on the questions at hand, research will rely on combinations of: policy document analysis; media analysis; surveys (existing and new); qualitative interviews (elite and non-elite); and ethnographic observation.

#### 2d. Normative self-reflection: cosmopolitical agency

In this research project, we ultimately address pressing socio-political questions: how can global risks be successfully dealt with under conditions of multiple competing modernities (Europe/East Asia) with their different normative models, material interests and political power constellations? In particular, we explore the extent to which the idealism of philosophical cosmopolitanism is nowadays turning into a novel ›cosmopolitical *realpolitik*‹: in the domain of climate change, the prospect of civilizational catastrophes raises a stark imperative for more transnational cooperation. To methodological cosmopolitanism, the question becomes: what *are* the cosmopolitical actor constellations, alternatives and visions now opening up – and how *realistic* are they? Once again, climate change is a ›laboratory‹ for researching these crucial questions for and of the future of the planet.

### 3. Work packages:

#### Cosmopolitan climate change and theory development

The transformative effects of cosmopolitization are most powerful in the domain of global climate change which has become a paradigmatic case for the fateful moral and causal interdependencies stretching across the globe, demanding new and as-yet unknown forms of transnational cooperation and solidarity. So far, research on climate change has been dominated by the natural sciences and, to some extent, economics; there exists a clear and urgent need to bring the other social sciences much more strongly to bear on this pressing, border-transcending problem. Moreover, while such research is now starting to pick up across a number of social science disciplines (e.g. Hulme 2010; Giddens 2011; Urry 2011; Yearley 2009; Jasa-

noff 2010),<sup>2</sup> the elaboration of a fully *cosmopolitan* approach to climate change is still missing. Climate change, I assert, manifests the hitherto strongest challenge for the social sciences to renew themselves in the age of cosmopolitization.

Building on the knowledge of the natural sciences, I employ the following *sociological* definition of climate change: climate change is a scientifically determined anticipation of threats to humankind, integrating social and natural aspects, which transforms socio-political institutions, economic interests, and cultural understandings.

These goals are to be achieved in two work packages. Work package one: *Cosmopolitan climate change*, consists in three distinct but interrelated empirical case study components, spanning across Europe and East Asia (greening world cities; low-carbon innovation networks; mediating global risks). Work package two: *Cosmopolitan theory development*, turns the case study components into an iterative and dialogical process of (re-)structuring methodological cosmopolitanism.

### 3a. Work package one: Cosmopolitan climate change

#### *Case study component 1: Greening world cities*

This case study component focuses on the cultural, socio-political and legal implications of how world cities in Europe and East Asia take part in trans-urban sustainability networks and shape cosmopolitan communities of climate risks. Cities are increasingly seen as vital strategic spaces for our global environmental future (Sassen 2010). By »greening« cosmopolitan urbanism, I refer to on-going processes whereby major cities around the world embrace transnational flows, long-distance trade, and dense webs of cultural exchange with the goal of developing low-carbon urban ways of life. This component asks: how do we conceptualize urban communities as important collective settings for organizing risk perceptions – and for mitigating and adapting to climate change, both locally and globally?

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<sup>2</sup>This list is very selective and restricted to recent work in sociology and social theory. In our research project we will engage closely with climate change research across a number of relevant social science disciplines, including human geography, anthropology, communication studies, political science, and international law. Moreover, we will engage in interdisciplinary dialogues with the natural sciences (see section 4).

*Case study component 2: Low-carbon innovation networks*

This case study component addresses the key economic, technological and political issue of low-carbon innovation. In the domain of new low-carbon technologies, collective innovation networks and capabilities may give rise to ›cosmopolitan innovation regimes‹. These include a global movement of ideas, scientists and entrepreneurs (Tyfield, Urry 2009). The questions for this case study component are: what are the key indicators for the emergence of cosmopolitan regimes of ›green‹ innovation? How should we account for the rising ambitions and in-built competitive tensions as a growing number of nations, businesses, scientists and civil society groups in Europe and East Asia engage with low-carbon innovation networks?

*Case study component 3: Mediating global risks*

For contemporary climate risks, the mediation of professional risk knowledges and perceptions, as orchestrated mainly by the global mass media, is a key issue. As man-made, incalculable and long-term threats, these risks often remain invisible to the naked eye and hence depend on being defined, anticipated, and contested in knowledge-claims (Beck 2009). Their ›reality‹ can be dramatized or minimized, transformed or denied, according to the norms which decide what is known and what is not in a particular socio-political context. In this case study component, we investigate how climate risks are framed, staged and perceived, in a transnational public and mass media domain, by actors in different European and East Asian contexts. The main question is: when do shared climatic risk perceptions emerge – and under what conditions do new regional imaginations in and between Europe and East Asia become important, in terms of understanding and acting on climate change?

## 3b. Work package two: Cosmopolitan theory development

Answering the question to what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible I bring in this work package two empirical and theoretical questions together in iterative fashion and open up new dialogues on the cosmopolitan turn to a worldwide community of researchers, on the one hand, and to wider policy and civil society audiences, on the other. The overall aim is to gain new insights into the strengths and weaknesses of

methodological cosmopolitanism, by bringing empirical insights from the climate change case studies to bear on the core social science challenge of theoretical and conceptual renewal for the 21st century.

While it is too early to exhaustively list the specific challenges to come up in empirical research, the aim is to raise key conceptual questions such as: (1) What are the emerging socio-political tensions between cosmopolitization and re-nationalizations? (2) What is *historically specific* about the world of cosmopolitization at the beginning of the 21st century? (3) How can facts of cosmopolitization and norms of cosmopolitanism be distinguished in the different contexts of research? (4) What forms of *governings* are involved in transformations of authority, power, norms, law and sovereignty? (5) To what extent is cosmopolitization an *unavoidable* and/or an *irreversible* process? Taken together, and linked to the issue of climate change, these questions raise crucial issues of how the social sciences may respond to, and help feed, new *ethical imaginations* for the future.

#### 4. Organizing methodological cosmopolitanism

Doing methodological cosmopolitanism is necessarily a collective enterprise involving a worldwide community of researchers. For this project, apart from the *key* team, I bring together a distinguished *co-team* of researchers from across a range of social science disciplines, with the aim to start organizing methodological cosmopolitanism as a genuine social-scientific paradigm shift.

To make the most of the intellectual resources embodied in this co-team, part of the theory development of work package two (section 3b) is intended to take shape during the following international workshops which bring together the key project team with researchers from the co-team:

Workshop on: Greening global cities and imagined cosmopolitan risk communities

Workshop on: Dialogue with international climate scientists and the key/co-team on common ground and differences, (mis)understandings and methods

Workshop on: Methodological Cosmopolitanism – Theory

Workshop on: Methodological Cosmopolitanism – Practice

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Workshop on: International Law and Global Cities  
Workshop on: Methodological Cosmopolitanism and Climate Change –  
Presentation and discussion of results

## 5. Expected impact

This research project will have a twofold impact. First, it constitutes a major contribution to how we can better understand the socio-political dynamics and the novel forms of collective action and binding decision-making that arise in the face of global risks and challenges. By validating and extending the shift from methodological nationalism to methodological cosmopolitanism, the project will have a major impact on the social scientific imagination as such, ultimately aiming to orchestrate a paradigm shift. This cosmopolitan turn promises to bring the social sciences on par with epochal transformations.

Second, the project carries considerable public and policy significance because it constitutes a reframing of climate change – one of the major challenges facing humankind – by looking at it from a cosmopolitan perspective. Through this perspective, we gain a better understanding as to if and how new kinds of actors, i.e. »cosmopolitan actors«, arise as drivers of socio-political transformation. As such, the project fills a blind spot in the current thinking about climate issues which is very sophisticated in regard to climate science, economic rationality and certain policy designs but lacks a systematic understanding of how different *societies, cities* and *regions* are changed by, and respond to, the risks of climate change.

## 6. The research team

The *key research team*, based in Munich, will include: Professor Ulrich Beck as PI,<sup>3</sup> assisted by Dr. Anders Blok (post doc and research fellow, currently based at Copenhagen University), Dr. Sabine Selchow (post doc and research fellow, currently based at LSE), Dr. Joy Yueyue Zhang (post doc and research fellow, currently based at Collège d'Etudes Mondiales, FMSH,

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<sup>3</sup> Principal Investigator, *Anm. der Red.*

Paris), two PhD students on scholarship and one administrative officer, helping the PI to manage the complex cooperation between key team members and co-team.

I plan seven visiting fellowships, which will allow us to have members of the co-team based in and working with the project. Prof. Yishai Blank, Tel Aviv University, specialized on the relationship between International Law, global cities and climate change; Dr. David Tyfield, University of Lancaster, specialized on ›cosmopolitan innovations‹ comparing Asia/Europe; Prof. Daniel Levy, State University of New York – Stony Brook, specialized on ›cosmopolitanized nations‹ and the social construction of risk in Europe and Asia; Prof. Kyung-Sup Chang, Seoul National University, specialized on cosmopolitization, comparing Asia/Europe; Prof. Sang-Jin Han, Seoul National University and Beijing University, specialized on comparing Asian and European risk societies; Prof. Munenori Suzuki, Hosei University – Tokyo, specialized on comparing Japanese and European risk societies; Prof. Yunxiang Yan, University of California/Los Angeles, specialized on individualization and risk in China and Europe.

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