

Advocates or observers? Slovenian newswriters and climate change

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Abstract

This paper analyses perceptions of the climate crisis by newswriters of Slovenian (online) media and their news coverage of this topic. Through qualitative analysis of the in-depth interviews, the paper offers insights into the attitudes, perceptions, and motivations of selected Slovenian journalists and editors about climate change reporting and new insights into journalism practice and environmental journalism in Slovenia in terms of the peculiarities and contextual factors that can influence coverage of extreme weather events and climate change. The results show that the environmental and climate topics are underrepresented in Slovenian media, and these topics are covered in accordance with newsworthiness and public liking factors, and marketing neoliberal pressures to sell the news and make a profit. Such a commercialization and popularization of environmental journalism might lead to the passiveness of the audiences since it does not mobilize public awareness but rather represents the environmental topic as just another story in the media. The lack of analytical depth, critical problematization, wider contextualization of climate change, and the exaltation of journalistic norms of dramatization, eventization, noveltyization, and personalization prevent grasping the problem holistically.

KEYWORDS: climate crisis, Anthropocene, environmental journalism, journalistic conventions, editorial politics, interviews

Introduction

The heat waves, forest fires, and catastrophic floods of summer 2023, as well as the record-breaking temperatures across Europe and other parts of the world, were just a few of many recent extreme weather events that contributed to the increasing media attention to climate change and, more importantly, the emerging climate crisis. The latter is not just another topic on political and media agenda but is a systemic challenge that societies face “from everyday life choices to the very foundations of the economy, social interests and power relationships” (Kunelius & Roosvall, 2021, p. 1). However, as Trumbo and Shanahan (2000) contended two decades ago, accurate measurements of atmospheric carbon dioxide levels began as early as 1957, and scientists have been concerned about the effect that humans might be having on the atmosphere through the emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases since the close of the 19th century with the rapid industrialization of societies. Moreover, the discursive struggles over the meaning of climate change and the problematizations it entails have a similarly long lifespan, and the notion of climate change, which is invested with antagonisms, circulates in a variety of societal fields, including academia, politics, everyday life, and the media (Filimonov & Carpentier, 2022).

Instead of “climate change” or “climate crisis,” many authors in recent years have spoken about the era of the Anthropocene – “the name proposed for a new geological epoch defined in terms of human impacts on the Earth System” (Sklair, 2021a, p. 3). They argue that there is much research on how climate change and global warming are reported in the media all over the world, although truly little research on how the Anthropocene is reported in the media. The concept of the Anthropocene is less likely to be presented in the media; therefore, it is likely that most people have either never heard of it or have no clear idea about it (Sklair, 2021a). In comparison to climate change or climate crisis, the Anthropocene is a more holistic idea that directly implicates human behavior and its effect on Earth’s system. Thomas (2014) argues that she uses “the Anthropocene” instead of “climate change” or “global warming,” although it is a somewhat contested term, it does not misleadingly imply that the threats are limited to atmospheric increases in methane and, especially, carbon dioxide. Importantly, the Anthropocene implies a human agency responsible for all climate changes, while it explicitly implies the cause of human behavior for the climate crisis.

This paper deals with the question of perceptions of the climate crisis and the epoch of the Anthropocene by the journalists and editors of selected Slovenian media. What has changed in highly mediatized societies, and how are the digital media contributing to

the variety of narratives about climate change and the Anthropocene? How, for example, do various journalism standards contribute to the salience of the issue? Are the perceived roles of journalists and editors shifting toward climate change advocacy? According to Painter et al. (2022), there is mixed evidence about a shift in some media outlets toward weak advocacy roles (e.g., pressing for more climate action from governments) or hard advocacy roles (e.g., supporting NGO campaigns). In contrast, Robbins and Wheatley (2021) found strong resistance to the idea that mainstream climate reporters are becoming more “activist.” They assert that “reporting evidence and scientific reality does not equate to advocacy” (Robbins & Wheatley, 2021, p. 12).

Schäfer and Schlichting (2014) make a strong point that climate change is not easily perceivable as it is usually described on large temporal and spatial scales. Descriptions of climate change are usually complex and are produced by science, and similar can be said about the effects of climate change. Consequently, most people learn about climate change from the media (Schäfer & Schlichting, 2014). Although research so far has focused mostly on print media, Koteyko and Atanasova (2016) argue that over the previous two decades, communication about climate science and policy has been profoundly influenced by the internet and social media (see also Ružić et al., 2023 for the analysis of Montenegrin online media). However, Sklair (2021a) argues that there is little knowledge about the Anthropocene among the public, whereas select groups of academics, environmental professionals, social scientists, humanities scholars, and creative artists do engage actively with the issues of the Anthropocene, the media and public have weak or no knowledge about the Anthropocene.

Given that climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of certain kinds of extreme weather, Strauss et al. (2022) have argued that journalists and the media play a crucial role in informing the public about the implications and impacts of climate change on their daily lives. One way of doing this is by accurately reporting and explaining extreme event distribution.

More importantly, the public understanding of the issues in question is heavily influenced by political documents and agreements. Not only that, the media attention to the problem of climate change rose sharply and has been considered and discussed more intensively after the Conference on Climate Changes in Copenhagen organized by the UN in December 2009; the next important report, the Paris Agreement,¹ according to

¹ This global agreement on climate change was signed on 12 December 2015 in Paris, and its basic goal was to limit global warming to a level “significantly lower” than 2 °C. This goal refers to the period from the year 2020 onwards.

Kunelius and Roosvall (2021) represented important groundwork for the framing of the issues as a crisis.

With this focus in mind, the paper focuses on the following research questions: RQ1: How do the environmental journalists and editors define their role, and what common practices do they follow, including their use of sources? RQ2: What are the main types of content they produce? RQ3: To what extent do journalists cite organizational and contextual factors as influences upon their reporting?

In Slovenia, research on public perceptions of climate change or the Anthropocene is scarce, so the paper contributes to the understanding of how scientific information takes shape in online and legacy media. Since climate change is a global issue, the Anthropocene a new geological era, and the media as a social phenomenon under the influence of modern information-communication technology also acts globally, it is completely clear that scientists throughout the world sought to demonstrate a media picture of climate change.

Climate change and the media: Dominance of framing and agenda-setting approaches

In recent years, reporting about climate change has been extensively studied through various approaches and theories, but framing and agenda-setting can nevertheless be identified as the most frequently used. For example, Shi et al. (2019) conducted a computational linguistic analysis based on the large-scale data acquired from the online knowledge community Quora to address climate change communication from the agenda-setting perspective. As most other researchers, they also accentuate that certain narrative strategies may make climate change issues more salient by engaging the public in discussion or evoking their long-term interest. In contrast, Guenther et al. (2023) systematically reviewed 275 papers and concluded that research on the framing of climate change shares many similarities with trends observed for framing research overall. They highlight a lack of research on frame production and research gaps that contain a strong focus on newspapers and text-based frames. More research needs to focus on audience frames.

Trumbo and Shanahan (2000) emphasized a connection between the content of the mediated information environment and the state of public understanding, which can be especially strong for national or international issues that have low intrusiveness in the present, have distant time horizons, and have high levels of conflict. According to them, climate change embodies all these characteristics, and that is why the research on the

public understanding of climate change operates under the global hypothesis that cycles in media coverage embody narratives that guide public understanding. Schäfer and Schlichting (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of research on media representations of climate change and accentuated the field's strong concentration on Western countries and print media. With a focus on online media in a post-socialist context, our study consequently aims to shed some light on different media environments.

Romps and Retzinger (2019) focused on the presence or absence of basic scientific facts about climate change in New York Times news articles about this subject. In their analysis of nearly six hundred articles on climate change, they established that, with one exception, basic climate facts appear in those articles today with vanishingly small frequencies. Schäfer and Schlichting (2014) attempted to identify the drivers of media attention for climate change in three countries: Australia, Germany, and India. They calculated the monthly amount of climate change-related coverage in two leading newspapers for each country in relation to all articles published in the respective newspapers over a 15-year time span (1996–2010). The results show that weather and climate characteristics are not important drivers for issue attention in two of the three countries and that societal activity, particularly international climate summits and the agenda-building efforts from international nongovernmental organizations, have stronger impacts on issue attention. Günay et al. (2018), in contrast, adopted content analysis to answer the question of how the mainstream and alternative media frame climate change in the Turkish context. Their analysis of data from three periods between 2007 and 2015 indicated alternative media's potential to serve as an "alternative public sphere" by voicing the unspoken public debates on climate change. Focusing only on India, Keller et al. (2019) used automated content analysis to identify themes and topics of climate change reporting. They demonstrate that climate change has gained more media attention since 2007 in general, with a particular increase in focus on the theme of climate change impacts. In the content analysis of newspaper coverage of international climate politics in five countries, Königslöw et al. (2019) highlight a shift in the arguments used over their 10-year period of analysis in which a shift to questions of fairness in the distribution of costs and gains occurred.

Boykoff's (2008) study of representations of climate change in UK tabloids from 2000 to 2006 showed that news articles on climate change were predominantly framed through weather events, charismatic megafauna, and the movements of political actors and rhetoric, while few stories focused on climate justice and risk. In addition, headlines with tones of fear, misery, and doom were most prevalent.

In recent years, research employing discourse analysis has become more frequent in analyzing climate change communication. Koteyko and Atanasova (2016) highlighted four principal areas where discourse analysis has proved useful for assessing climate change communication and media representations. Firstly, in identifying discourses in a broad sense as socially, politically, and historically situated constellations of meaning; secondly, in revealing the strategies for constructing social actors and social identities; thirdly, in examining the visual aspects of climate change representations; and lastly, in analyzing the form and function of linguistic constructs from a critical perspective.

Moreover, Sklair (2021a) contends that there is much less research done connected with the reporting of the Anthropocene; therefore, this paper aims to fill the gap in Slovenia by documenting and analyzing how the media in Slovenia report the Anthropocene in relation to climate change. The term “Anthropocene” emerged publicly in 2000 but was, as Sklair (2021a) argues, barely mentioned in the media in the following decades. The Anthropocene Media Project (AMP) started in late 2016, and from the years 2000 to 2017, researched almost 2,000 newspapers, magazines, and news sites in over 140 countries and around 4,000 items mentioned the Anthropocene, while in contrast, over 400,000 items on climate change and global warming were identified between 2004 and 2018. What follows from these results is that the idea of anthropogenic—human-induced ecological change is underrepresented in media. The belief of some populist politicians that anthropogenic climate change is a hoax is, therefore, also a significant threat to public awareness of the issue.

Among other contexts, climate change has also been discussed in the context of moral panics (Rohloff, 2019), but in our study, we would especially like to draw on more specific body of literature that deals with journalism, its characteristics, and conventions in connection with the reporting about climate change. Among these studies, examining journalists as interpretive communities and examining climate change reporting in the context of tabloidization should be mentioned as important directions of research.

Environmental and climate journalism in the Anthropocene: From observers to advocates?

Brüggemann and Engesser (2014) focused on climate journalists as key mediators between the sphere of science and the public sphere. In their study, they surveyed journalists from five countries and five distinct types of news outlets and emphasized that despite all the differences between journalists working in vastly different contexts, there is a common ground regarding interpretations of climate change, assessment and handling

of climate change skeptics, expertise in climate coverage, and usage of sources. They claim that climate journalists constitute an interpretive community (Brüggemann & Engesser, 2014), which means that they are connected by common interpretations of climate change and how to cover it.

Berglez (2011) conducted an analysis of interviews with 14 Swedish environmental journalists from various news media who have been part of editorial concentrations on climate news. The results consist of three ways of conceptualizing the climate issue among journalists: inside, outside, and beyond media logic. In their opinion, these conceptualizations give rise to three conflicting types of journalistic creativity, more precisely, the ability to effectively insert the climate issue “into” media logic, the ability to go as far “outside” media logic as possible while remaining credible by arraying the climate issue in “scientific language”; and finally, the ability to think beyond the media-logic “box” and do something about it—to change journalism.

In climate journalism, the most significant finding is that the reporting of climate journalists is dependent and influenced by the availability of and access to a variety of sources, including NGOs, corporations, researchers, and politicians. However, a common criticism that climate journalism faces is the persistent use of climate skeptics as a source, which in the past was partly explained by the journalistic norm of balanced reporting (Strauss et al., 2022).

Schäfer and Painter (2020) recently looked at the scholarship for journalism. They highlight that the ecosystem of climate communication (particularly journalism) is changing, but research is still overly focused on traditional media outlets and their content or output (instead of production and sources). They also point to several well-documented changes in the media landscape that have diversified the field. Journalists have a wider range of roles to draw from, from the traditional “gatekeepers” of knowledge to the “curators of information” and “advocates” of climate policy. Van Eck et al. (2019), in contrast, established in their analysis that the journalistic norms of traditional journalists identified by Boykoff and Timmons Roberts (2007) are not identical to the journalistic norms of climate change bloggers. The norms of personalization, dramatization, and novelty were supported by some interviewees in their sample but not by everyone.

Method and sample

The present study is exploratory and designed to pursue a qualitative, interpretive approach based on qualitative interview data of the Slovenian journalists and editors who engage in the reporting on climate change and the Anthropocene. It involves eight in-

depth interviews: four of them were conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic between November 2021 and January 2022. Interviews took place remotely via Zoom platform, phone calls, and e-mail. In Slovenia, the political climate during the pandemic created additional obstacles when engaging with journalists and editors. The government's approach to managing the media landscape may have influenced the availability and willingness of newswriters to participate in interviews. This environment likely impacted the focus of their outputs, making it a critical element for examination in the study. This is why four additional interviews were conducted in September 2023 in person. The decision to conduct a second set of interviews post-pandemic was strategic. This timing allowed for an assessment of how journalistic practices and perceptions evolved as the immediate pressures of the pandemic waned. Even though the comparison between these two periods is not within the focus of our study, it helped us understand the adaptability and resilience of journalists in navigating both the health crisis and the complex political situation at the time.

The oral data on which the analysis is based was thus triggered by a comprehensive semi-structured questionnaire. Interviews were conducted in the Slovenian language; they were recorded and later transcribed. Thematic analysis of empirical material was performed to identify underlying patterns across the dataset. The transcribed responses were coded for analysis, which did not subscribe to any theoretical model but was aimed to trace dispersive accounts of the phenomenon and, by recognizing recurring patterns across the dataset, contribute to the understanding of a complex phenomenon of media coverage and newswriters' perceptions of climate change and the Anthropocene. The main purpose of our research analysis is to deconstruct the newswriters' perception of these topics and their news coverage to follow the contours of the media construction of wider public perception of these topics.

By using the interpretive approach, we wish to map and unravel the environmental newswriters' interpretive community, their inconsistencies, and contradictions in experiencing the reporting, including their sources, the type of content they produce, and to what extent they cite organizational and contextual factors as influences upon their reporting. We conceive climate journalists and editors as the authors of news items that focus on climate change and the Anthropocene and are published in leading national (online) news outlets. The definition is thus based on a) journalistic practice and b) the context of a newsroom that is trusted to provide a certain degree of editorial independence. Scientists, lobbyists, or environmentalists may also act as climate journalists if they publish pertinent articles in established journalistic media. This broad understand-

ing of climate journalists enables us to grasp the entire diversity of authors shaping public debates on climate change and the Anthropocene in Slovenia.

Using in-depth semi-structured interviews with environmental newswriters in Slovenia, we examine the extent to which reporters covering environmental topics encounter and deal with the challenges mentioned above. Interviews were carried out with four journalists and four editors working for the Slovenian Press Agency and some of the most-read online media outlets in Slovenia:² Multimedijски center RTV SLO, zurnal24.si (Styria-media.si), 24ur.com (ProPlus), Delo, Večer, and n1info.si. During the transcription of the interviews, we anonymized interview data by replacing identifiable data with pseudonyms and removing sensitive information to protect participant privacy and meet ethical standards. Building on other interview-based studies into roles and perceptions of science and environmental newswriters, we explore how modern environmental journalists' and editors' experiences and their work can act as a guide for the construction of public awareness and public opinion about these topics.

The textual analysis of interviews was conducted to consider the attitudes of journalists and editors toward climate change. This involved an in-depth and close study of the transcribed interviews. It consisted of reading the material individually and in the context of the other parts of the text. We then engaged in a second reading of the data to identify similarities and patterns among the first-level codes and identify places where larger thematic evaluations were occurring. The textual analysis enabled the identification, interpretation, and contextualization of the patterns of meaning (see also Negra et al., 2019) to map the newswriters' perception and reporting about climate change and the Anthropocene.

Results

Environmental topics and neoliberal pressures: Business as usual

The biggest problem with environmental journalism in Slovenia is that it does not receive sufficient space in the media outlets, although anthropogenic climate change is one of the most influential problems of the contemporary world. As most of our observed newswriters report, there is either no special section in their media outlets for environmental problems, or the topic is not covered enough:

In our opinion, there is not enough environmental news for an independent section, so we publish it mostly under the health and similar sections. Often also

² According to the organization for measuring website traffic, <https://www.moss-soz.si/rezultati/>.

under other sections, depending on the background—Slovenia, World, (Editor 2)

Newswriters mostly report that their media do not have a dedicated section for the environment because readers do not like this topic and do not read it. Such perceptions of the audience by the editors and journalists might be dangerous because newswriters presuppose that the audience is not interested in this topic and the topic does not receive sufficient space:

We put this topic everywhere. If there is some short news, it is on the news board. If we make these in-depth articles out of it, it is more In-depth. So here it is ... In one way, I think it's even counter-productive if it's put in a special tab because usually, he / she rarely likes to click on those things. (Editor 4)

Such news coverage of anthropogenic climate change communicates to the audiences that the topic is not newsworthy if it does not have enough space in the media outlet, and in turn, audiences' perceptions of this topic are created accordingly—if the topic is not covered in the media, it also seems not important for the audience. Newsworthiness is generated by newswriters (Tuchman, 1972; Lester, 1980), and events and occurrences are not simply mirrored by journalists. News is a product of reality-making activity and not simply reality describing one. According to Lester (1980), newswriters transform the everyday world into published and broadcasted events-as-stories. Lewis (2001), furthermore, argued that media reporting has a considerable influence on the construction of public opinion; media can suppress dissent about the topic or create public consent. However, with such underrepresentation of the topic, as our interviewees report, climate change and the Anthropocene seems like a minor problem in the Slovenian news agenda and consequently in the public perception. What is even more striking is that our results show that Slovenian media outlets started to report about environmental topics due to the marketing pressures—media houses discovered that the environment could be very well sold to advertisers:

I think it's been at least five years since my predecessors started it. Then, it stagnated for a while. It was in a kind of hibernation for a while, and then it even disappeared from the main page. Then, on the initiative of our marketers, because they recognized that the journalistic topic of the environment is also very interesting for advertisers, we basically pulled the section out of our sleeve (Editor 3).

Such neoliberal capitalist pressures take advantage of even the climate crisis and try to turn this first into a newsworthy topic and later into a profit-making topic. This action is close to the “planetary Eurocentrism” posture (Holzer & Sklair, 2021, p. 59), by which neoliberalism goes hand in hand with the Eurocentric position, which puts Europe in the center of the world, seemingly because it is sufficiently aware of the environment, but as our newswriters admit, mostly because of profit-making value.

However, what is encouraging is that our interviewees see that climate change is a human product. In their view, the Anthropocene is put in front, but further research should be made to analyze their reporting if the Anthropocene is covered sufficiently in the Slovenian media:

Looking at it differently, climate change is the topic of this decade and the decades to come. Again, these affect everything—from energy to floods and dangers. This is somehow what is key in this case. Again—everything is connected. We are talking about the fact that we have an environmental crisis, not just a climate crisis. We have humans, species extinction, deforestation, and so on. Everything goes hand in hand – all because of the number of people on the planet (Journalist 4).

Although the Anthropocene is in the consciousness of the Slovenian newswriters, we might best characterize their media coverage of the topic as “business as usual” (see also Holzer & Sklair, 2021, 183), connected to the politics, economy, everyday life, and similar. This might be positive from one perspective, but such an editorial politics might also be very dangerous because it downsizes the overall importance of the environmental issue when they connect it to other social fields and, in turn, also relativize it as not being such a significant issue by itself. Other conflicts in life might be compared to the environmental conflict, and they are staged on the same level, while the main conclusion might be that the mass media and many of the scientists and commentators have been generally neutralizing the risks of the Anthropocene, either by failing to mention them or by turning them into opportunities for human ingenuity and profit (Sklair, 2021b):

Today, the environment is really everything, and that's why it's also complex. Therefore, it should not be separated from other topics. Everything is so intertwined that it's not even worth separating plastically. As soon as we separate it from other topics, people will perceive this topic as something separate from politics, something separate from the economy, something that stands for itself but is not actively involved in all the conflicts of life (Journalist 3).

Although this newsworker is aware of the environmental problem and its anthropogenic roots, in her answer lies a danger that when comparing the climate crisis to other social fields, it might turn away the audiences' perception of the real problem. Such news politics also follows the neoliberal capitalist logic that all social fields are subordinated to one, and that is the economy. Holzer and Sklair (2021), in this regard, maintain that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism," which "often subtly undermines the unwelcome hints that there really is an existential problem for humanity" (Holzer & Sklair, 2021, pp. 183-184).

Dominance of event-orientated reporting

The lack of analytical depth and critical problematization of climate change and the Anthropocene in news reports is further evidenced in the answers of our interviewees. Instead, newsworkers mostly concentrate on specific events; moreover, they focus mostly on the consequences of climate change. Such reporting can be called "event-orientated reporting," which focuses on details and particularities—on individual events and is not able to grasp the whole picture holistically (see also Macdonald, 1998). Audiences receive fractions, parts of the whole problem, while critical problematization, contextualization, and analytical synthesis of the environmental problems are lacking. If newsworkers persist in such a reporting and expose mostly the description of events and consequences of climate change, the causes for the whole problem remain unproblematized, and the audiences receive only a small and biased picture of the effects of the Anthropocene:

The problem is that we have a lot of natural disasters. And since we have many natural disasters in the news segment, I would say that we mostly report on the consequences of global warming or climate change. Most of it is, I would say, about the consequences. Yes, and then about all these things that affect our daily lives. Also about political ones. If there is a commitment to reduce carbon footprints or emissions, we will allocate money for that, too.... There are a lot of such things, that is, useful things, but especially natural disasters. Well, I would point that out. And, of course, all these political things, from the COPs, what is going on in the USA, and so on. (Editor 3)

When we asked newsworkers how they covered these topics, the most common answer was that they focused on the events. What is also problematic is the persistent coverage of the consequences that are connected mostly with the political and economic impacts

of climate change for people, while the real reasons and causes of the Anthropocene remain untouched. Mostly capitalist neoliberal logic is again put in the forefront; what concerns newswriters are higher costs for people (electricity, heating, water, etc.), and such a reporting implies “the good Anthropocene” (Sklair et al., 2021, p. 51) where there are no traces of people being responsible for these problems. Media coverage is reassuring and neutralizing (ibid., p. 78) when it focuses on specific, minor problems/events:

It depends on the events; there is no systematic coverage. Recently, we covered the topic of the Mokrice hydropower plant and the environmental permit as an economic and political issue, the heating cost calculator as a consumer issue, the purchase of electricity from renewable sources and the state not achieving its commitments, again as a political and environmental topic... In short, the coverage of this area is not systematic. If we look only at these three topics in the last month, it depends on some trends or events. (Editor 2)

Event-orientated reporting relates to the coverage of international global warming summits and global staged events. In our newswriters’ answers, important levels of similarity in frames, sources, and imagery can be found. For example, world summits have been described as extraordinary events, with similar sources and material available, constrained options for coverage, and resulting similarities in the coverage of different media:

Climate conferences are important, as are the views that nothing happens and that we are closer to a climate catastrophe. If something positive happens, it is also important. We devoted quite a bit of space to COP26 Glasgow. (Journalist 1)

Although the reporting of conferences and summits is at the forefront of Slovenian media reporting and is usually covered as a particular event, our interviewees report that they are aware that such political topics are less important than analytical stories that cover the problematics of climate change. However, what we found problematic is that such political events or semi-political events take up much space for their reporting, and these topics are turned into important political events. Therefore, in the eyes of the audiences, they are reduced to a solely political problem, which loses its main cause – a human being responsible for all these changes. Such event-based reporting shrinks the real problem to an ordinary event. When reporting about different politicians being aware of these problems and about the conferences, it turns the attention of the audiences to the political side and makes climate change a one-dimensional problem, something that only politicians can deal with:

We reported about COP26 Glasgow during the launch when our prime minister [Janez Janša] was giving a speech. Now these are some, as I would say, semi-political – political events that we must report on. It seems to me that our users are more interested in some stories through which this matter can be presented, so to speak, in a more plastic way, or more clearly for them. We know conferences are just discussions, but that's about it. (Editor 1)

Moreover, the news values of personalization and dramatization of the event (see also Macdonald, 1998; Pušnik, 2003) are also put in front. Journalistic norms always shape the selection and composition of content. If we paraphrase Van Eck et al. (2019), Slovenian newswriters favor personalization, dramatization, and novelty norms. The “personalization” norm refers to journalists’ focus on stories that emphasize the human-interest aspect of individuals’ trials and tribulations rather than structural or institutional analyses. The “dramatization” norm favors controversy and an immediate sense of excitement over continuity in society and past or future conflicts. The “novelty” norm clarifies journalists’ focus on news that is fresh, original, and new in favor of repetition and long-term analyses (Van Eck et al., 2019, p. 2). Our interviewees argue that it is more likely that they will report about climate change or political conferences and summits if these events have a dramatic site and are more personalized (either with the Slovenian politicians attending the conferences or other public figures performing and “causing a stir” if we cite our interviewee):

Even when there is a big COP when all the countries of the world are there to negotiate... I was at three, and let's say Paris, when they really achieved something in 2015, it still had so little following, but then it all fell into the water. In my opinion, the national ones are somehow more popular. Well, it's nice if there's a national event that has a character that causes a stir. For example, Nika Kovač is great. Because they are all going to bother, it's terrible what is happening to her, and it's not right. But she will achieve something because she has the public's attention. (Journalist 3)

Such reporting, based mostly on the reporting of the events and elevating drama and personal side is very one-sided and covers up the variety and the complexity of the problem of climate crisis. The effect of such a reporting is that audiences perceive the Anthropocene as a solely political matter that has nothing to do with their action and even resolves them of responsibility so they can see themselves as “the good Anthropocene” (see Sklair et al., 2021, p. 51).

The lack of specialization and professional training of newswriters

Science and environmental professional training for journalists is a new niche, which is poorly developed despite extensive climate change: “A small number of programs provide training on scientific and environmental topics to early- and midcareer journalists across the globe” (Smith et al., 2018, p. 161). Journalists in Slovenia are usually not specifically specialized for covering environmental topics, and science and environmental training is not a part of the Slovenian “journalistic interpretive community” (see Zelizer, 1997) in which members of such a community share similar values, assumptions, and a common framework for interpretation. As the most common answer in our interviews confirms: “Many report on this topic, although they are not specialized in this area. ... We do not send journalists to special training of this type” (Editor 2). In contrast, Brüggemann and Engesser (2014) have argued:

Climate change poses unique challenges to journalistic routines, most importantly due to its procedural nature and the uncertainty attached to scientific models and risk assessments. It is, therefore, interesting to find out whether journalists develop common assessments about climate change and discover how to deal with it as reporters and thus form interpretive communities. (p. 403)

Our interviewees maintain that there is mostly no specialization supported by their media houses and that environmental journalists are not specifically trained in this area:

Two of us report exclusively on environmental topics ... Other colleagues occasionally write about these topics. Our employer does not send us to train in this field. I could give our employer some quick training. Just kidding. I have been dealing with climate change, wastewater treatment, and the like since 1992. I had to process so much literature and have so many conversations that it can already be considered training. I was also invited to several courses; I also have some certificates, for example, from the Faculty of Economics. (Journalist 1)

Only two newswriters among all the interviewed say that they have trained journalists for the covering of this topic and that they have specialized journalists for the reporting on ecology, but that the training “depends on themselves because the editors as such cannot have a career plan for everyone. See, the British Embassy organized some kind of workshop before the COP and two of our employees went. Yes, I suggested it to them, but they found it themselves” (Editor 3). What is specific for Slovenian environmental journalism is that, in most cases, Slovenian reporters are self-taught environmental newswriters and that mostly all workers in the newsroom must have knowledge of how to report about climate change. Or vice versa, specialized journalists for ecology

must also report on other topics, while “given the nature of our medium, they also must do other things, summarize other topics. It depends. If they are on duty, they must report on all the topics, otherwise when they are doing some authors work... and as far as the environment is concerned, we have, I might say, two journalists who are more specialized, one in particular” (Editor 1). Or, as others also report:

In our newsroom, we have an economics editorial that is divided into areas, and the environment is among them. Therefore, one person covers the area of the environment. However, we all need to know everything at STA. So yes, I think we all know how to deal with environmental issues as well. (Journalist 2)

Yes, two are specialized. ... Yes, I mean, the desire is much greater. Many female journalists want to report on the environment. Unfortunately, this is not quite possible, because we are a very broad portal, we cover a lot... what do you call it... we are all-arounders. We don't specialize in ecology, and we basically added two female journalists to oversee keeping the subpage alive. Which is basically a very big deal; it seems to me that we have given a lot with this. At the same time, of course, no one is prohibited from engaging in this. If someone is on call and something happens, they cover it, and they have to. (Editor 3)

In most cases, Slovenian newswriters who cover environmental topics are self-trained, and they are motivated to gain new knowledge, although their superiors usually do not support them officially, such as in the shape of searching for training courses, motivation, or financially. Moreover, what our newswriters maintain is that environmental and pollution topics have become a new “market niche” for companies. Media houses, therefore, have a special interest in such topics because of market-oriented causes and not because of planetary problems and the effects of the Anthropocene. Such reporting has become popular because of selling the news content and not because of the problem itself. Molek-Kozakowska (2018) talks about “popularity-driven coverage of climate change,” which can also be called commercial science journalism, for which she finds out that popular journalism eliminates some information for the sake of newsworthiness and that the frames, narratives, and news values used in such popular articles discourage broader mobilization of the audiences. We observe that journalists would like to report on this topic when the topic is popular, is selling well, and is genuinely liked. The problem is that this is connected with market expectations and the audiences’ perception of this topic as a “hot topic” and not with the real problems of climate change connected to the Anthropocene:

I think that there is anyone specializing specifically in this area in Slovenia. More often than not, they are journalists who deal with science or follow the environment a little more broadly. But not exclusively the environment. ... Slovenian companies have also started to deal with this. In fact, it has become a niche market for promoting companies. I mean, without this topic, you can't be serious either as a media or as a company. (Editor 4)

The situation in Slovenia regarding the covering of environmental topics by trained and specialized reporters is quite ambiguous; the prevailing model is based on self-taught, self-motivated journalists who cover these topics. Everything is left to the ingenuity of journalists. The following comment is illustrative: "Personally, I'm a bit atypical here because I first had a topic, and then I became a journalist. I am a biologist by education; I graduated in biology in Ljubljana. In Slovenia, two biologists are now journalists" (Journalist 3). In contrast, research results reveal that those journalists who were professionally trained gained more confidence and skills for science and environmental reporting and that there are small positive changes in source selection, references to scientific uncertainty, and thematic framing in the year following participants' training experience, and, finally, as results highlight, that interpersonal interactions and ability to talk with scientists are the most valuable part of the training experience (see Smith et al., 2018).

News sources and objectivity: Insisting on official sources and "factism"

A recent study on the mediation of expertise on climate change in the UK (Coen et al., 2021) identified its expressions in claiming the entitlement to knowledge, the use of expert language, the construction of statements as factual, appeals to common sense, and the presentation of solutions. At the same time, the very content of expert statements on climate change varies depending on the political and cultural context. In our study, we observe that there is a huge reliance on official sources; when we asked our interviewees what sources of information they use to report on environmental topics, the most common answer was official sources, such as governmental and non-governmental organizations, but also "scientific journals":

Q: What about any international and national agencies, organizations, or associations...? For example, EEA, UN?

A: Yes, yes. All this. Journalists who write for us use all sources that are relevant. (Editor 4)

As for the domestic things that happen regarding ecology, there are a lot of things related to politics. We have quite a lot of political sources. ... [At the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning], they have already learned that, basically, they have to respect NGOs before they agree to do anything. Because we went to check with NGOs, if this law is cool and so on. And we found out that this law stands. But in any case, we gave both media space and space in our articles. (Editor 3)

Furthermore, most newswriters use the same sources, which are usually official sources of COP meetings or other government and non-government sources. However, as already Hansen (1991) discovered, newspaper stories that were delegated as quality journalism are less likely to use official or government sources than regular stories and search for alternative sources (from more ordinary people—with or without an official affiliation—as well as individuals representing labor or other special interest groups). We can speculate that the media could meet the model of using diverse sources in a pluralistic society, but instead, the newswriters report that their sources are mostly official, organizational, and political:

We covered COP very intensively throughout the years. If possible, we also send our journalists to these conferences. We were in Paris, where this Paris Agreement was adopted, which was groundbreaking. Then, for some time, we really didn't go. Now we are going to Dubai. So yes, we are monitoring that. If we are not present on the spot, of course, we are in touch with the negotiator and the minister... they usually organize some kind of briefing via Zoom; either way, it is doable. Otherwise, we draw primarily from websites because the COP also creates its own website, foreign agencies... (Journalist 2)

There are some indicators of thinking that journalism should provide access to the widest possible range of voices, and there were some intentions to cover the summit meetings and conferences by their own media houses' journalists, but at the end of the day, usually, the costs prevent such actions. As Phillips (2010) states, professional journalists rate investigating, fact-checking, and standards of accuracy high among the qualities that set them apart from amateurs, bloggers, and influencers:

I was thinking about sending a correspondent or a journalist [to COP26 Glasgow]. In the end, it was the costs that prevented us from doing so. But we got a lot of agency material from there. That is, from various agencies that we work

with, and we used this material very, very much. I think otherwise; we have never reported as much on a climate summit as we did this time. When it comes to video content... I mean, we've put a lot, a lot of programming time into that. (Editor 3)

Newswriters report that they have a lot of various sources, although these are mostly organizational and official sources, and in such a journalistic choice of official sources, the Anthropocene is reported very one-dimensionally, mostly the political side is covered, and in many cases, a wider contextualization is missing. The sources that our newswriters see as most important "are the resources on the ground, in Slovenia. Those who deal with it, sources as ARSO, official sources, sources in official structures and in NGOs" (Editor 2). Or, according to another newswriter:

As already stated, I have been dealing with these topics for almost 30 years. During this time, I got so many sources, acquaintances, and friends that I really have no problem with sources of information. It also often happens that I am contacted by new interlocutors who feel addressed by my texts. This is how the network expands. In addition, I have connections to a bunch of organizations. Of course, their innovations must be translated into the Slovenian situation, and opinions must be obtained from the Slovenian context (Journalist 1).

If we move further, some newswriters argue they understand the most important source should be science. They admit that they do not use science as a source enough and that they should include it more often in their reporting, preventing the ideology of skeptics from expanding. They report about "Google Scholar, Nature Science. See, Wikipedia is often a great starting source too. Not for citation, but to look for additional resources from these sources. Things open to you that you would not have otherwise" (Journalist 4). Or, as he continues:

I think that we need to take science more into account, not just when it supports our preconceived beliefs. This is my opinion. A very good example of this is Greenpeace, which is very vocal when it comes to climate change. They claim: "Science tells us what to do". Then there is the case of genetically modified organisms, where Greenpeace is the main intimidator and "distorter" of scientific facts.... The same is true for nuclear energy, for example. Greenpeace is a strong opponent, even though science and scientific facts do not support this opposition. It is an ideology. And here is the biggest problem: most journalists do not know how to distinguish themselves but rely on what they are told and take it for the facts. And then ideology is often sold, not facts. (Journalist 4)

In their study based on the content analysis of 3.781 articles from 1995 to 2017, Comfort et al. (2020) have revealed striking similarities between reporting in China, India, Singapore, and Thailand regarding the use of sources. All four countries demonstrated a heavy reliance on government sources, followed by scientists. The same conclusions can be made for Slovenia: most of our newswriters use the same sources, mostly official political, organizational, and scientific, but to a lesser extent, alternative sources. The media representation of the environmental topics in Slovenia is created by the same sources; if there is, for example, an instance of water pollution, the audiences can receive very thorough coverage of it from the institutional point of view, but to a lesser degree the deep analytical problematization of the connection to the Anthropocene is covered.

What we further observe is that the daily deadlines of journalism make the coverage of scientific data difficult over time. This influences the practice of source-media relationships. Time, space, and scientific literacy pressures often lead to one-source stories and over-reliance on one source, usually an expert. When it comes to the groups and individuals who are seen as credible and legitimate environmental news sources, the media are vulnerable to picking agents that have developed a strategy on how to gain access to the media as potential sources. The selection of sources is ideological and hierarchical, and groups with vested interests develop media strategies around that (see also Buetner, 2010, p. 84). Moreover, media principles such as balance, which still define good practice within news production, lead to formulae of presenting two opposing points in dramatic form. This inhibits the coverage of scientific complexity and skews the balance; what a tiny minority is beginning to look like a valid counterbalance (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007). In the case of reporting climate change, many scientists criticize the media for perpetuating indecision by including both scientific and non-scientific claims as if they were of equal validity. The reporting is mostly in accordance with journalistic rules and norms, following the ideal of objectivity, as our newswriters report that they are reporting without judgments:

Protecting the environment is the first requirement. I prefer to write about solutions that could be used more widely. Otherwise, I do not decide how I will report on environmental topics. The most important thing is that I find out the essence of the matter or understand the topic, and I adapt my reporting accordingly. On some topics, I am just going to summarize what someone said. Everything is according to journalistic standards and rules, without judgment. (Journalist 1)

Such factism, as the central journalistic convention of the objectivist paradigm, together with the episodic treatment of the problem, therefore dictates distanced reporting and a decontextualized stringing of bare actions that should speak for themselves; the implicit meaning of these stories is to create an impression of the multitude of topics covered when reporting about climate change and as a result of such journalistic reporting is the creation of a culture of *innocent* Anthropocene or *good* Anthropocene, while usually anthropogenic causes for the climate crisis are not covered. Elizabeth Bird (2009) sees a reduced dependence on official sources as one of the crucial first conditions for journalism to emerge from its (self)-declared crisis. According to her, journalism has two options. Otherwise, it can cling to the traditional concept of objectivity and continue to struggle to survive in a “relativistic, cynical world where whatever sells wins” (p. 49). The way of “doing journalism” could be redefined primarily by reducing dependence on official sources, by increasing independent reporting, or by involving municipalities with the help of important, ethnographic stories that can offer a distinct experience that would address the problem of the Anthropocene and would offer a contextualization and analytical problematization of the topic covered.

Discussion: “The good Anthropocene”

Our study has provided insights into the attitudes, perceptions, and motivations of selected Slovenian journalists and editors about climate change reporting. Overall, our results offer answers to our research questions, and they testify that environmental journalism in Slovenia is still developing; it is not an independent branch of journalism, which is also connected with its institutionalization, while journalists are mostly self-taught and self-motivated to report about this topic. There is no clear editorial politics or directions on how to cover environmental and climate topics, and the “interpretive community” of environmental journalists in Slovenia is still under construction while it is evident that newswriters still do not share similar values or a common framework for interpretation of this topic (see also Zelizer, 1997).

The environmental and climate topics are also underrepresented in Slovenian media; in most media outlets, there is even no special section, although climate change poses a global catastrophe, and these topics are covered in accordance with a) newsworthiness and “public liking” factors to represent the topics which are pleasing to the audience, and b) marketing neoliberal pressures to sell the news and make a profit. Such a commercialization and popularization of environmental journalism might lead to the passiveness of the audiences since it does not mobilize public awareness but rather repre-

sents the environmental topic as just another story in the media. The present drive towards commercialization is evident within the entire world of covering science (Meyer, 2006). Meyer (2006) argues that such journalistic reactions could be expected to undermine public trust in scientists, and in the long term, this may lead to an erosion of the idea of knowledge as something that cannot simply be reduced to the outcome of negotiation between stakeholders. This may be countered by science turning human, by recognizing its membership in society, and by recognizing that such membership entails more than just commercial relations.

Moreover, as Rögener and Wormer (2017) observe globally, the lack of contextualization and the deficient elucidation of the evidence pose major problems in environmental reporting. The lack of analytical depth, critical problematization, wider contextualization of climate change and the Anthropocene, and the exaltation of journalistic norms of dramatization, eventization, noveltyization and personalization prevent grasping the picture holistically. The persistence in the reporting of the individual events, which are mostly political or semi-political events and are further dramatized and personalized, reduces the complexity of the problem of the global climate crisis and creates the Anthropocene as a solely political matter so that the audiences can see themselves as “the good Anthropocene” (see Sklair et al., 2021, p. 51) and the climate problems as something not connected to their actions.

In addition, what is interesting is that only a few of the interviewed newswriters use the notion of climate crisis but talk about climate change, and moreover, almost none of them talk about the Anthropocene. Kunelius and Roosvall (2021, p. 4) emphasize that many professional media outlets in a later period adopted new editorial policies, starting with the Guardian and its Climate Pledge, committing to talk about “crisis” or even “catastrophe” or “emergency”. Only such a perspective might also help to grasp the Anthropocene in all its dimensions.

Conclusion

Although our analysis was focused on the perceptions of newswriters, it is important to consider journalism in its wider social context. Although science skepticism and denialism have always existed, shifting values, growing inequality, and increasing polarization created a societal backdrop (see also Achiam et al., 2024). Science in general and science about climate change especially is often under attack by political criticism and populism. As Egelhofer (2023, p. 361) has argued, in today’s “post-truth” world, concerns over political attacks on the legitimacy of expert knowledge and scientific facts are

growing. Populist politicians especially frequently use their social media platforms to target science and journalism, arguing these are part of an “evil elite,” deliberately misleading the public by spreading disinformation. While this type of discourse is overly concerning, thus far, we lack empirical evidence on how these accusations affect the public perceptions of scientists and journalists, Egelhofer (2023) concludes.

Our study showed that reliance and insistence on the official sources, governmental, non-governmental and scientific, and factism are the main news strategies and conventions that drive Slovenian environmental journalism, which leads to the underestimation of the analytical problematization and contextualization of the Anthropocene and climate crisis. Environmental reporting is thus based on one-source stories or “balanced” reporting, usually covering two differing opinions, which is still a highly appreciated strategy in the Slovenian journalistic interpretive community. It is connected to the objectivity ideal, and together with factism, they create the objectivity paradigm. Wien (2005, p. 3), in this respect, argues in general for journalism that “several attempts have been made by journalism to break free of the positivistic objectivity paradigm, none of them very successful.” In terms of role perceptions, our study is in line with other attempts to understand how journalists and editors in Slovenia articulate and re-articulate their roles and professional ideals, such as, for example, a qualitative interviews study from Vobič (2021) who pointed to eclecticism in journalistic roles, re-articulated in the connections between journalism, power, and the public, leading to contradictory assessments with respect to journalism’s autonomy and responsibility.

Moreover, our study has some limitations. First, the small number of interviews allows us only initial insights into the perceptions of newswriters, so additional studies from a comparative perspective are needed in the future. Secondly, and more importantly, such an expanded study should also include some other actors and voices in the public space, such as science communicators or specialized bloggers that focus on environmental issues, as they also contribute importantly to the public salience and interpretation of the issue in question.

In conclusion, we offer empirical evidence about the roles, attitudes, and perceptions of environmental editors and journalists, as well as how journalists deal with outside pressures and other key factors. We can also conclude that climate journalists constitute an interpretive community. Despite different national and editorial contexts, journalists display a broad consensus. First, the journalists agree to all four statements of the IPCC consensus. Second, they agree on the assessment of climate change skeptics: their contributions are seen as hardly scientifically proven. Third, journalists argue that skeptics

should be given a chance to make their points if what they say is critically assessed. Most of the journalists do not want to provide skeptics with space equal to the one granted to other voices (Brüggemann & Engesser, 2014). Nevertheless, they rarely leave their role as mere observers and assume more advocative positions that would at least temporarily leave the position of neutrality and norms of objectivity. As Strauss et al. (2022) have argued, the role of journalists in drawing scientifically accurate links to climate change and extreme weather is vital in contributing to public understanding and engagement with climate change.

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Povzetek

Prispevek analizira, kako novinarji slovenskih (spletnih) medijev dojemajo podnebno krizo in poročajo o njej. S kvalitativno analizo poglobljenih intervjujev ponuja vpogled v stališča, zaznave in motivacijo izbranih slovenskih novinarjev in urednikov pri poročanju o podnebnih spremembah ter nove vpoglede v novinarsko prakso in okoljsko novinarstvo v Sloveniji z vidika posebnosti in kontekstualnih dejavnikov, ki lahko vplivajo na poročanje o ekstremnih vremenskih dogodkih in podnebnih spremembah. Rezultati kažejo, da so okoljske in podnebne teme v slovenskih medijih premalo zastopane, obravnavane pa so v skladu z dejavniki objavljanja in vsečnosti javnosti ter marketinškimi neoliberalnimi pritiski po prodaji novic in ustvarjanju dobička. Takšna komercializacija in popularizacija okoljskega novinarstva bi lahko vodila v pasivnost občinstva, saj ne mobilizira zavedanja javnosti, temveč predstavlja okoljsko temo kot le še eno zgodbo v medijih. Pomanjkanje analitične poglobljenosti, kritičnega problematiziranja, širše kontekstualizacije podnebnih sprememb ter povzdigovanje novinarskih norm dramtizacije, eventizacije, novosti in personalizacije, namreč onemogočajo celostno dojetje problema.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: podnebna kriza, antropocen, okoljsko novinarstvo, novinarske konvencije, uredniška politika, intervjuji

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