The spatial ordering of climate change knowledge and the IPCC

During its 20 year history, the UN Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has been examined critically from a number of different standpoints: dissecting its 1980s origins (Franz, 1997), revealing its norms, practices and self-governance (Agrawala, 1998), debating the role of consensus its assessments (Demeritt, 2001), policing characterizations of uncertainty (Edwards & Schneider, 2001), and tracing the relationship of its institutional function and knowledge claims to emerging ideas of global environmental governance (Miller, 2004). But other questions about the status of climate change knowledge synthesized by the IPCC remain uninvestigated, questions which emerge from the agendas raised by the new geographers of science (e.g. Livingstone, 2003; Powell, 2007). As Sheila Jasanoff has shown in many of her writings, knowledge that is claimed by its producers to have universal authority is received and interpreted very differently in different political and cultural settings. Revealing the localization and spatialisation of knowledge thus becomes central for understanding both the acceptance and resistance that is shown towards the knowledge claims of the IPCC.

This PhD project will deploy the theories, insights and tools of the geography and sociology of science to reveal how climate change knowledge in the IPCC is spatially produced and consumed and how it travels between sites of production and consumption … "in the consumption of science, as in its production, a distinctive regionalism manifests itself" (Livingstone, 2003:123). The IPCC presents its reports to the world as the 'consensus view of the leading climate change experts in the world'. But how are the contours of this knowledge shaped? How localized are the sites of climate change knowledge production? How well does this knowledge travel to the sites of consumption? Geographical dimensions emerge in addressing each of these questions.

At an elementary level, questions of personnel and their geographical settings need to be examined. But more significantly attention must be paid to the peculiarities of the production sites of the primary knowledge assessed: the exclusive network of climate modelling centres that exerts power over descriptions of future climate; the voids on the Earth's surface where few or no observations of climate, phonology or tide variations are made; the digital circuitry and laboratory practices which transform millions of meteorological measurements into (just) a very small number of indices which capture the state of the Earth's climate in a single temperature register. An understanding of the ways in which space modulates these processes of production, and the alternative ways in which this construction process might work, is essential for scrutinising claims of credibility and legitimacy.

Geography plays a central role not only in the production of IPCC knowledge, but also crucially in its consumption. What counts as authentic public knowledge in one state, might have much weaker traction within another. The consensus science of the IPCC might look persuasive from the centralized sites of production. The views from the peripheries of space, of power and of culture - the very places where knowledge is consumed - look very different.

This PhD would suit graduates of geography, environmental history or environmental science who are interested in the ways in which environmental problems are identified, framed and constructed. The research would be largely literature based (peer-review articles, internal documents, media coverage), supplemented through interviews with leading actors in the IPCC, and may involve visits to other institutions in the UK or beyond. The student would be based in the School of Environmental Sciences at UEA and be affiliated to the Tyndall Centre.

<u>Further Reading</u>

Hulme,M. (2008) Geographical work at the boundaries of climate change *Trans. Inst. Brit. Geogr.* (in press); Jasanoff,S. (ed.) (2004) *States of knowledge: the co-production of science and the social order* Routledge, London; Livingstone,D.N. (2003) *Putting science in its place: geographies of scientific knowledge* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 234pp.; Miller,C.A. (2004) Climate science and the making of a global political order pp.46-66 in, *States of knowledge: the co-production of science and the social order* (ed.) S.Jasanoff, Routledge, London

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