

Framing Extreme Event Attribution from the Bottom up – an Enquiry into the Social Representations of key stakeholders, of the Press and of Climate Scientists

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Abstract content

Attribution of extreme weather events has recently generated a lot of interest simultaneously within the general public, the scientific community, and stakeholders affected by meteorological extremes. This interest calls for the need to explore the potential convergence of the current attribution science with the desire and needs of stakeholders. Such an enquiry contributes to the development of climate services aiming at quantifying the human responsibility for particular events.

Through interviews with climate scientists (internationally and within Germany), through the analysis of the press coverage of extreme meteorological events (heat wave in the Paris area, storm surges in the baltic sea), and through stakeholder (private sector, government services and local and regional government) focus groups, we analyze how social representations of the concepts associated with extreme event attribution are theorized. From the corpuses generated in the course of this enquiry, we build up a grounded, bottom-up, theorization of extreme weather event attribution. This bottom-up theorization allows for a framing of the potential climate services in a way that is attuned to the needs and expectations of the stakeholders.

From apparently simple formulations: "what is an extreme event?", "what makes it extreme?", "what is meant by attribution of extreme weather events?", "what do we want to attribute?", "what is a climate service?", we demonstrate the polysemy of these terms and propose ways to address the challenges associated with the juxtaposition of four highly loaded concepts: extreme – event – attribution –climate services.

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