



Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper
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Climate Change Summits beyond Copenhagen, Who Goes, Who Stays, and How Are They Covered?

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Trinity Term
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*'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.
It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness.
It was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity
It was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness
It was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair...'*

**Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities
Chapter I, opening paragraph, p. 3.
(Originally published in London: Chapman and Hall, 1859)**

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Acronyms

AOSIS	Alliance of Small Island States
COP	Conference of the Parties
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
LCD	Least Developed Countries
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RISJ	Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism
UNFCCC	United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change

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1. INTRODUCTION

The economic crisis and the emergence of new communication methods have led to a revolution in mainstream media, in which the parameters that have worked for years are rapidly changing. Mario Benedetti, a Uruguayan writer, was famously quoted as saying ‘When we believed that we finally had all the answers, suddenly, all the questions changed’, and that seems to be true for journalism, a profession now more than ever in full pursuit of answers.

One of the main ‘questions on the table’ is what is happening with international coverage. Recent research by the Reuters Institute¹ has shown that one of the first effects of this revolution is the decline in correspondents and special envoys being sent abroad. Two of the main factors in this decline, seemingly, are the inability to cope with the high cost of foreign coverage; and the possibility of gleaning what is happening in other parts of the world through new media like citizen journalism².

Another of the main issues under debate is how the priorities of the media have significantly changed. Not only have economic difficulties of various countries, and the protests against the cuts, relegated other news to the background in the Western world, but also media digitalization has made news even more governed by the clock, as Alex Jones mentions in his thoughtful book ‘Losing the news’³.

In this context, the aim of this research is to analyze how these two general phenomena affecting journalism (declining international coverage, and lack of attention in the newsroom to the news that requires either months of investigation or relentlessly regular coverage) have had an impact on particularly sensitive and complex information such as reporting on climate change, and more specifically the largest international event held in this field: the annual summit of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

¹ The status of international coverage in the new media ecosystem has been widely analysed by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ) in publications like ‘Are Foreign Correspondents Redundant?’ by Richard Sambrook, or the recent research ‘Reinventing the Foreign Correspondent’ by Simon Kruse.

² Sina Motalebi, head of the BBC Persian Service gave a good example of how Persian TV is covering Iran without a single correspondent on the ground in his lecture ‘New and Old Media in Iran’ at the RISJ.

³ In ‘Losing the News: The Future of the News that Feeds Democracy’ (Oxford. Oxford University Press. 2009), Alex Jones analyses the changes sweeping the media and provides an authoritative account of why good quality journalism is the essential food supply of democracy.

In order to achieve this goal, this research tries to answer two questions: Who now goes to the summits; and for those that do not go, how they cover it.

The reference point to study is the attendance at the famous Conference on climate change (COP 15)⁴, held in Copenhagen in December 2009. As James Painter clearly explains in 'Summoned by Science'⁵, Copenhagen was not a summit in the style of the previous fourteen, but rather an example of what researchers define as the 'eventization'⁶ of the media. Its coverage, with nearly 4,000 accredited journalists, was comparable to events like the Olympic Games or the World Cup and even when the result of Copenhagen was considered a real failure, 'it is one of the few times that the use of the adjective 'historic' – applied to a summit- can be fully justified'⁷.

Bearing in mind that Copenhagen was an exceptional summit compared with the ones that had both preceded and succeeded it, there are several peculiarities in its coverage that makes it interesting as a point of reference. In regard to media attendance, Copenhagen was the first climate change summit at which journalists from developing countries were out in force, and in addition it was the largest political international event covered by new media, such as the internet, blogs and tweeters. Both trends have had a very interesting evolution in the two subsequent summits (Cancun in December 2010 and Durban in 2011), compared to attendance by journalists from developed countries and/or traditional media.

The data analysis conducted in this study has confirmed what some journalists who attended Durban had already suspected⁸: The number of journalists from mainstream media in developed countries is dwindling after Copenhagen, and the number from developing countries is steadily increasing, especially those coming from emerging economies such as Brazil, India and China.

Editors in most countries subscribed to the view that 'Copenhagen was the meeting that would decide the fate of the planet'⁹. Thus, the high expectations generated and the

⁴ COP: Conference of Parties (and, in this case) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

⁵ James Painter, *Summoned by Science: Reporting Climate Change at Copenhagen and Beyond* (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2010).

⁶ Nick Couldry, Andreas Hepp, Friedrich Krotz (eds), *Media Events in a Global Age* (New York, Routledge, 2009).

⁷ Quoted in Painter, 'Summoned by Science'.

⁸ James Fahn, *Inside COP17* (Columbia Journalism Review, December 2011).

⁹ Quoted in Painter, 'Summoned by Science', (24).

disappointing ending have resulted in a loss of trust in the possibility of reaching a global agreement to reduce emissions¹⁰, and, by extension, to combat climate change in general. This fact, combined with the economic crisis, seems to have led editors in most Western countries to a simplistic view that: 'It is impossible to save the planet, so while the global warming comes, let's focus on another type of coverage' (more simple and cheap). Or as the typical current editor ironically described by Alex Jones would say: Climate summits 'are not as much fun to read about'.

It is virtually unquestioned that climate coverage has crashed in most of the Western countries after Copenhagen¹¹. University of Colorado's Maxwell Boykoff has tracked the decline in 50 newspapers across 20 countries and 6 continents¹², and showed the drop in most parts of the world, in some cases to pre-2007 levels. Likewise, The Daily Climate, an American website that produces and tracks media stories about climate change, declared 2010 as 'the year climate coverage fell off the map'; and its recent analysis demonstrated that the downward spiral in US and UK outlets continued in 2011¹³.

The decrease in climate coverage that started in 2009 has generally been accompanied by a comparable drop in Western countries' attendance at the two summits after Copenhagen, which has been widely documented in the US¹⁴, but less so in the European Union, the geographical area which historically has sent more reporters to cover summits¹⁵.

The analysis of attendance and features published and broadcast from Copenhagen to Durban has shown that a significant number of editors of major media outlets in Western Europe decided not to send their environmental correspondents to South Africa, but asked them to cover it from their desks.

Seven of those journalists have been taken as case studies in this research. All of them meet similar criteria: they belong to a European country which had a significant number of media representatives in Copenhagen (Denmark, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and United Kingdom); they covered that conference in situ and at least two

¹⁰ Bryan Walsh. Another Year, Another UN Climate Change Summit (Time magazine, November 2011).

¹¹ Curtis Brainard. Climate Coverage Crashes (Columbia Journalism Review, January, 2012).

¹² Maxwell Boykoff. Center for Science and Technology Policy Research (CSTPR). Link: http://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/media_coverage/

¹³ Douglas Fischer. Climate Coverage Down Again in 2011 (The Daily Climate, January 2012).

¹⁴ James, Fahn. Inside COP17 (Columbia Journalism Review. December, 2011).

¹⁵ As shown by the media participation statistics provided by the UNFCCC press office, and by graph number 5: Trends in European media attendance.

previous ones; and they did not go to the last summit in Durban but reported about it from abroad.

These are some of the issues they were asked to reflect on for this study: Why their editors decided not to send them to Durban; how the fact of not being in situ changed their way of reporting and the quality of their stories; how they used new media during the summit; and what they think journalists' responsibility is in the trend that climate change is not being treated with the same urgency after Copenhagen.

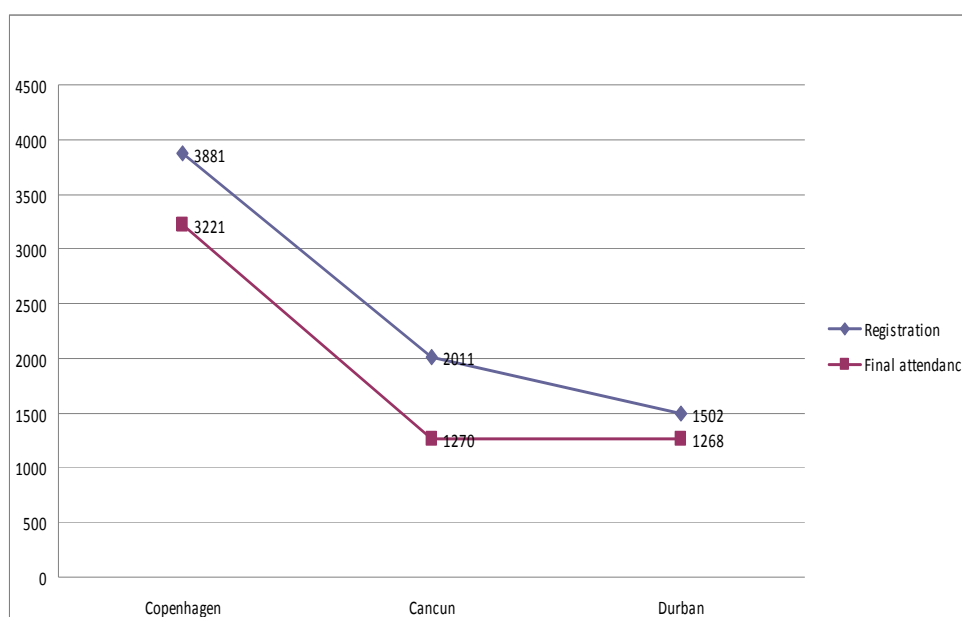
Their answers raise important questions not just about the quality of non in situ reporting, but also about whether this new way of reporting is going in the right direction in the race to engage citizens, who are already suffering strong 'climate fatigue' after many years of communication failure from journalists, politicians, scientists and environmentalists, in this immensely challenging issue about the future of the planet.

2. Attendance at Copenhagen and Beyond

2.1 Methodology

The UNFCCC press office provides media participation statistics for those accredited to attend summits and those who finally attended. The media registration list is divided into seven categories: daily, news agency, online, periodical, photo, radio and TV; and it is listed by name of the journalist, country of origin and the outlet the reporter works for.

However, as Durban's COP17 final media attendance list was not available when this study was carried out, pre-registered journalist lists were used for the summits analysed in order to have comparable figures. The variation between the registration list and the actual attendance in the last three conferences can be found in graph 1:



1. Variation between registration and attendance

In pre-registration lists no details are given for the journalists' country of origin, so I have worked with internet searches and other methods to assign each individual name to a country.

Following the methodology used by James Painter's 'Summoned by Science'¹⁶ to analyse the attendance, this research has kept apart, in a different category, all the journalists

¹⁶ James Painter, 'Summoned by Science'.

belonging to the 13 main international news agencies because it was not clear where each individual reporter came from and, secondly, because the main target audience is an international one. Consequently, the nationality of journalists working for Agence France Presse (AFP), al Jazeera, Associated Press (AP), BBC, Bloomberg, CNN, Dow Jones, Getty, Google, Inter Press Service (IPS), International Herald Tribune, Reuters, and United Press International (UPI) has not been taken into account. However, journalists from CBS were assigned to the USA, EFE to Spain, RFI to France and Deutsche Welle to Germany.

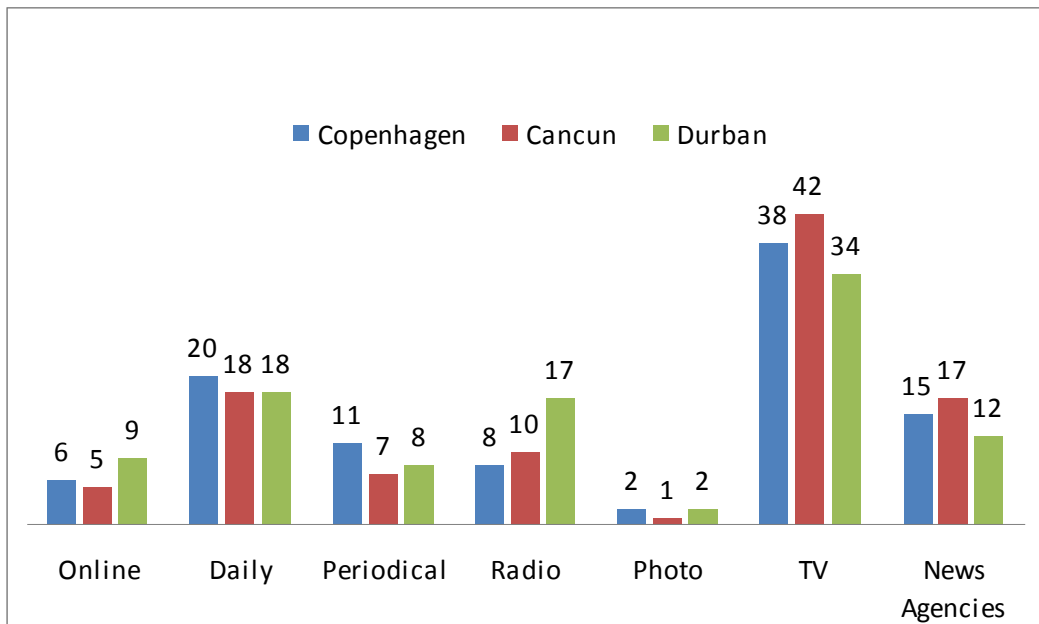
One of the main goals of this research is to examine trends in media attendance from the developed and developing world. Because of this, I have included journalists from Australia, Canada, Europe (Iceland and Russia included), Japan, New Zealand and USA in the group of developed countries and all the others in the group of developing countries.

In examining these trends, it has to be taken into consideration that host countries supply a large percentage of the journalists accredited at the summit. Indonesia provided 470 at the Bali summit (31% of all journalists there), Poland 325 (39%) at Poznan, Denmark 507 (13%) at Copenhagen, Mexico 339 (17%) at Cancun and South Africa 533 (35%) at Durban. In addition, the geographic location of the summit also influences the source of media attendance. It is obvious that attendance at both Poznan and Copenhagen summits was more easy and affordable for the European media and Bali, Cancun and Durban was the same for Asian, American and African media, respectively.

Bearing in mind all the assumptions and exceptions mentioned, the data analysis conducted has shown the following findings and trends.

2.2 Trends by Media Type

The breakdown of attendance by media type in the last three climate summits shows a major increase in online and radio journalists, and a decrease in periodicals and news agencies. (see graph 2)



2. Trends by media type

If Copenhagen was the summit in which reporters from new media were out in force, Durban was the one that confirmed and consolidated the rise of online presence in the summits. Their presence has grown by 3 points from COP15 (6% of the total) to COP17 (9% of the total).

A considerable increase has been noticed in radio journalist presence, which has risen from 8% in Copenhagen to 17% in Durban. However, part of this increase can be attributed to a significant number of radio journalists from the host country, South Africa, and other African countries¹⁷.

On the other hand, there has been a major decrease in periodical¹⁸ outlets which has decreased from 17% of the total in 2009, to 7% in 2010, and 8% in South Africa.

A notable decline has been noticed in news agencies' attendance at Durban. This has varied from 15% in Copenhagen to 12% Durban. Conversely, there was an increase at Cancun (17% of total) but that is because of the influence of a large number of journalists

¹⁷ According to the media participation statistics provided by the UNFCCC press office.

¹⁸ UNFCCC's press office considers 'periodical' magazines and journals as those that are published at regular intervals.

from the Mexican news agency Notimex, and also from other small South American news agencies that attended Cancun but have not attended before or after¹⁹.

A similar decrease has been observed in TV journalists, from 38 to 34% in Durban. The increase of television reporters in Cancun (42% of total media presence) has to be ascribed to the large number of Mexican television journalists accredited, specially compared to other media types.

Finally, the percentage of daily media has also declined (from 20% in Copenhagen to 18% in Cancun and Durban), but in both cases these numbers were influenced by the significant number of television and radio journalists, respectively, registered from the host countries.

2.3 Developing countries

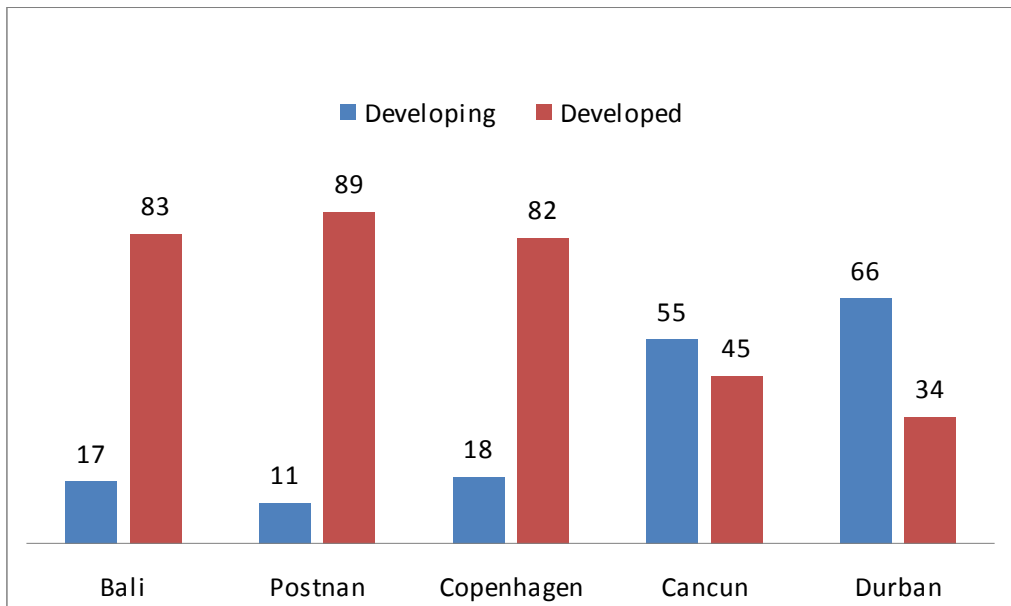
The Copenhagen summit was not only the first UNFCCC Conference in attracting the massive interest of outlets from developing countries, but also the last in which journalists from the developed world were in a majority in the press room.

COP16, in Cancun one year later, was the first summit in which journalists from developing countries outnumbered those from developed countries – in some senses a watershed summit.

Before Cancun, more than 80% of the journalists reporting a climate summit came mainly from Europe, USA, Japan and Canada. Those countries plus Australia and New Zealand represented 83% of media attendance at Bali COP13, 89% at Poznan COP14, and 82% at Copenhagen COP15. However, COP16 saw a reversal of the trend, with 55% of the reporters coming from the Global South. This change continued in Durban, where the number from developing countries increased to 66%, whilst those from developed countries dwindled to 34%.

The following graph shows the significant change of dynamic:

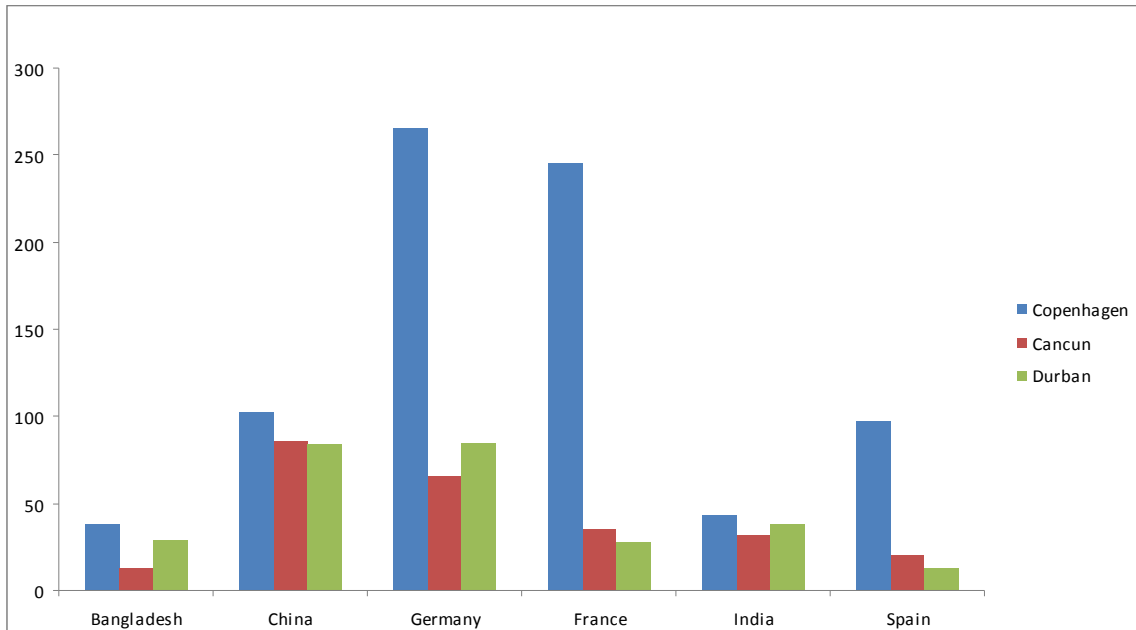
¹⁹ According to the analysis of the statistics provided by the UNFCCC press office.



3. Trends in media attendance (%)

Without taking into account the host countries, these figures are highly influenced by the large number of journalists from emerging economies such as China, India, Bangladesh and Brazil. In fact, the group of Chinese journalists in Durban, with almost 90 representatives, was larger than any other from developed countries, surpassing those that traditionally sent more reporters: France, Germany, Japan, Spain, USA or UK.

Thus, there were more journalists from India at Durban than from any other single European country, except Germany and the UK. And there were more from Bangladesh than from France or Spain, as can be appreciated in graph 4:



4. Trends by country from Copenhagen to Durban (Number of journalists accredited)

While Germany, France and Spain drastically reduced their media presence after Copenhagen, China, India and Bangladesh (with the exception of Cancun) almost maintained the number of journalists sent even when expectations for Cancun and Durban were much lower than for Copenhagen.

The case of China is even more surprising if we take into account the analysis of a former Chinese journalist, Liu Lican, who was quoted in a Columbia Journalism Review article saying: 'This time the -Durban- conference is not a hot topic in China'²⁰.

However, this result may have been influenced by the fact that institutions which used to subsidize summit travel expenses for an important number of journalists in various European countries, as was the case of Spain, have ended the practice because of the economic downturn. By contrast, there are several organizations paying for journalists from the Global South to attend these summits. An example of that is the Climate Change Media Partnership, through which Internews, Panos and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) brought 19 fellows to Durban from fifteen developing countries. Another example is the Indian Centre for Science and Environment who also sent a cohort of reporters to South Africa.

²⁰ James Fahn. Rescuing Reporting in the Global South. (Nature, July 2008).

Climate communication researchers, such as Max Boykoff, consider these initiatives as a great intervention: 'It's definitely a good investment to bring journalists to the summits. Articles can be picked up from the wires, but to have voices from developing countries themselves to help translate more effectively the larger processes at work is very important'²¹. However, Boykoff clarifies:

'There are legitimate concerns as to whether such training will improve the situation. Some question whether more coverage will actually spur action on climate change, with research to date delivering conflicting results. Raising awareness, furthermore, needn't rely on the media. Many programs targeting youth audiences, for instance, will naturally gravitate to educational activities'.

Discussion

Attendance vs. interest in the subject

First of all, it should be stated that the increase in summit attendance by the developing world is mainly attributed to six countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa. A number of least developed countries and small Island States continue to have very little or even no media representation in climate conferences, which means a significant lack of information for the most vulnerable citizens to global warming²².

A study carried out by the Panos Institute Southern Africa²³, an independent regional information and communication organization, has shown for instance, that there is a serious information gap in Mozambique, which is listed among the five low-income countries most vulnerable to sea-level rise and storm surges caused by climate change. They carried out a series of interviews with citizens from this African country and many of them said things like: 'Climate change is a punishment from God' or 'a consequence of the 16-year civil war'. The Panos study also found that local journalists rarely cover climate change; this research has verified that less than five journalists from this country attended the last Climate summit in Durban.

Similarly Boykoff, one of the researchers that has thoroughly analysed the connection between media coverage of climate change and engagement, has determined that 'It is

²¹ Boykoff quoted by James Fahn in 'Rescuing Reporting in the Global South'. (Nature, 2008).

²² IPCC Fourth Assessment Report, Working Group II: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability (eds Parry, M. L. et al.) (Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, UK, 2007); <http://www.ipcc.ch/ipccreports/ar4-wg2.htm>

²³ Media Coverage, Community Perspectives and Policy Response on Climate Change in Southern Africa: A Case Study on Mozambique, Swaziland and Zambia. (Panos Institute Southern Africa, 2008).

often those who are most at risk from environmental impacts, who also are those who typically have access to the least information about it through mass media'²⁴.

Another question this data raises is why the media in developing countries are currently more interested in climate change summits than those in the developed world. Are they more concerned about the science of climate change or about covering the political and economical interest of their countries related to this issue? This is beyond the scope of this research paper, but experienced climate correspondents such as Time's Bryan Walsh²⁵ have suggested that this increase in developing countries' attendance, both media and official delegations, has nothing to do with their concern about global warming but more to do with their interest in ensuring that 'they would not be required to do anything' to fight it – especially anything that could affect their economy negatively.

In addition, other Western climate journalists consulted considered that while the Global North has much to lose –in terms of the effect cutting emissions will have on their economy and within a short period of time the climate negotiations, the Global South has much to gain in terms of getting significant financial aid for helping them to cut emissions and adapt to climate change²⁶.

Quantity vs. quality

The figures suggest that the historical deficit in coverage of climate change negotiations in the developing world is being solved. However, a deeper analysis shows that this is not exactly the case. Firstly, climate summits are more about politics than about science²⁷; and secondly, more coverage in developing countries does not necessarily mean more adequate and better quality news, as the press officer for the London-based International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), Mike Shanahan, shows in his research 'Time to Adapt? Media Coverage of Climate Change in non Industrialised Countries'²⁸.

'While coverage of climate change in non industrialised countries is increasing, the quantity and quality of reporting do not match the scale of the problem', Shanahan underlined. That

²⁴ Max Boykoff quoted by James Fahn in 'Rescuing reporting in the Global South'.

²⁵ Bryan Walsh. Another Year, another UN Climate Change Summit. (Time, November, 2011)

²⁶ The Copenhagen accord offered a promise that developed nations will make available \$100bn a year by 2020 to help poor countries cope with climate change.

²⁷ James Painter's 'Summoned by Science' demonstrated that science of climate change represents a low percentage (less than 10% in the majority of the cases) of the contents reported on summits.

²⁸Mike Shanahan 'Time to adapt? Media coverage of climate change in non-industrialised countries' (Chapter 12 in the book 'Climate Change and the Media', published by Peter Lang Publishing in August 2009)

view is also shared by specialist journalist in Climate Change coverage in the Global South, James Fahn, who agrees the quality of climate stories in the Global South still remains 'inadequate'. 'Ignorance about the causes and projected impacts is widespread in the most vulnerable countries'²⁹, he stressed.

Among the interesting anecdotes Shanahan brings to illustrate knowledge gaps 'that suggest many millions of vulnerable people are being misinformed', there is one about an Asian reporter from a national radio station believing that climate change was the cause of bird flu; and a science journalist in Latin America telling him that there was not a broad consensus among climate scientists that human activities were largely responsible for climate change.

In addition, studies reveal a general reliance on reports from Western news agencies and developed countries' sources, by journalists from developing countries covering climate summits, rather than more locally relevant ones. The idea of using sources from developed countries to cover the interests of the developing world is worrying, as many experts have suggested. As a result, not much information is being given on any channel in these major developing nations about how the poor would be affected and how decisions taken in the summits about mitigation or adaptation will be relevant to them.

2.4 Western Europe

It is broadly accepted that the European Union has been one of the most pro-active participants in climate change international negotiations and one of the most convinced about the necessity for taking action to save the climate. After the strong influence it had over the Kyoto Protocol, many authors drew the conclusion that the EU was a leader, or at least had the capability to lead, in international climate negotiations.

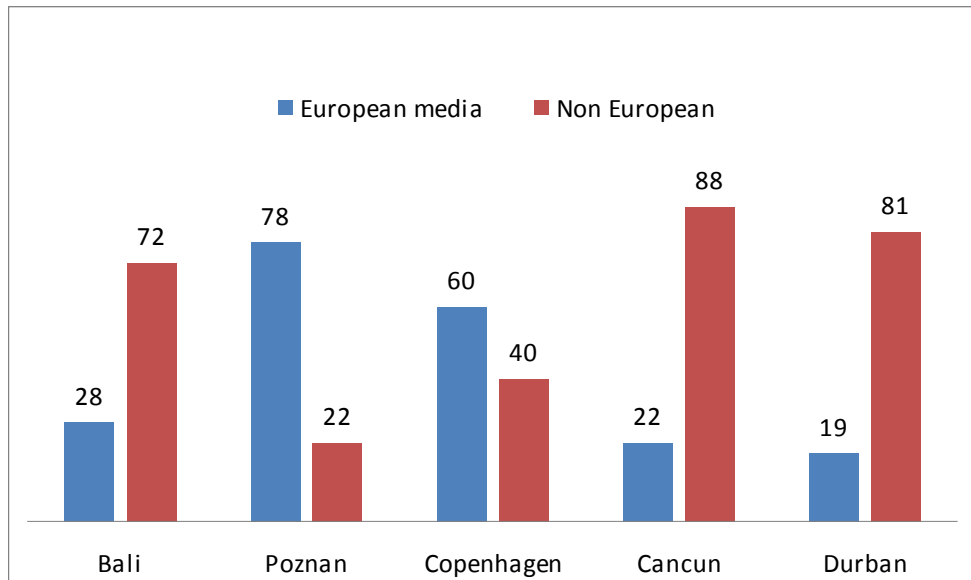
That implication and interest, with all its nuances, had been traditionally accompanied by major media coverage of climate summits in the region. Without taking into account the host country, Europe has had by far the largest number of journalists present at the summits held until Copenhagen.

However, COP15 was the conference that changed the trend in the majority of journalists in the press room being from Europe. European reporters have dropped from representing

²⁹ James Fahn. Rescuing Reporting in the Global South. (Nature, 2008)

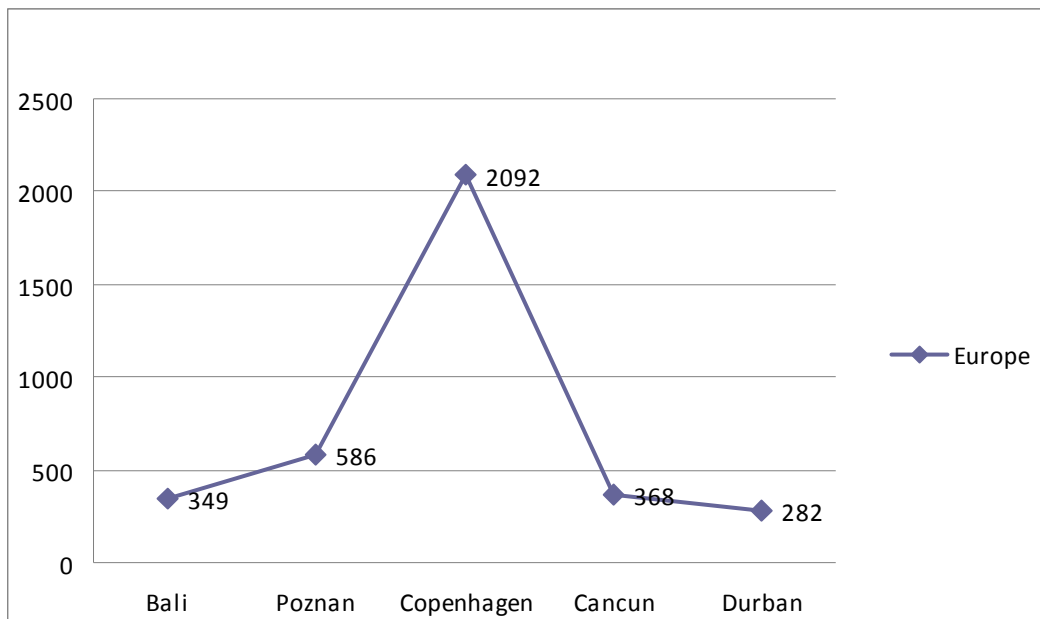
60% of the attendance at Copenhagen (of course that percentage was influenced by the summit taking place in a European city), to 22% in Cancun and then 19% in Durban.

The evolution of European presence in the last five summits can be appreciated in this graph:



5. Trends in European media attendance (%)

In numbers, the pre-registration list has moved from 2,092 European reporters accredited to cover Copenhagen to just 368 in Cancun and 282 in Durban.



6. European journalist attendance

Discussion

These figures obviously raise the question why European climate correspondents have evolved from being a majority to almost an ‘endangered species’ in the summits’ press rooms. There are a number of possible reasons which could explain this:

- Copenhagen was considered the end of EU success in its self-proclaimed leadership role in the negotiations. Instead of being a decisive participant, or even a leader, the EU was largely marginalized in Copenhagen, as several studies have indicated³⁰. The reason for that can be found in external events, but also in different interests among the member states. The EU’s lack of influence in climate summits seems to have persisted since then³¹.
- Due to the economic crisis in the Eurozone, environmental issues in general and climate change in particular have been relegated to the background.

³⁰ Alessi, M., Georgiev, A., & Egenhofer, C. Messages from Copenhagen: Assessments of the Accord and Implications for the EU (European Climate Platform. Report No. 9, April 2010); Curtin, J. The Copenhagen Conference: How Should the EU Respond? (Institute of International and European Affairs, Dublin. January 2010); Phillips, L. Hedegaard: EU must speak with one voice on climate (Euobserver. January, 2010); and Rankin, J. A Union with one Voice? (Europeanvoice, May, 2006).

³¹ Gloria Eppstein, Sina Gerlach and Maren Huser. The EU’s Impact in International Climate Change Negotiations (Maastricht University, May 2011).

- Not only summits, but also climate change coverage in general in European media has decreased³².
- Several studies have observed a general decline of international media coverage in general, and summits in particular³³, in European mainstream media due to the economic downturn.

Nevertheless, the aim of this study is not to focus on the reasons for the decline, but to examine the narrower issue of European climate correspondents covering these summits from afar. This will be the objective of the second part of the research.

³² University of Colorado's Max Boykoff and Oxford University's Maria Mansfield has tracked that significant decline in coverage of climate change around the world, Europe included:

http://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/media_coverage/world_normalized_graph.jpg

³³ Kaijaleena Runsten. *The Global Trade Negotiations in News* (Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2012).

3. Reporting from Afar

3.1 Overview of case studies

One of the main aims of this research is to examine how correspondents from mainstream media in Western European countries who used to attend climate summits, now cover them from afar, and how this has affected their coverage³⁴.

In order to achieve this, I interviewed seven experienced climate reporters who meet these six criteria:

- Belong to a Western European country with significant presence in Copenhagen.
- Work for a mainstream media in one of those countries.
- Is a specialised correspondent who has covered Environment and Science for a minimum of five years.
- Have travelled to report about at least one summit before Copenhagen.
- Covered Copenhagen on the ground.
- Did not attend Durban, but reported about it from home.

The countries they belong to are: Denmark, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom; and in order to have a better perspective on a broad range of outlets, three of them work/worked³⁵ for leading daily newspapers, three for major TV channels and one for the largest news agency in that country³⁶.

In six of the case studies the outlet did not send anyone to Durban; and just in one case, which corresponds to the BBC, they sent a small team of four to Durban, for radio and web reporting, and to provide input into TV pieces. However, the BBC also had correspondents reporting about Durban from London, including the person interviewed for this research. Because this might have influenced some of the answers, every time that a response might have been affected by such circumstances, it will be pointed out that the answer is from the BBC person.

³⁴ The text of questionnaire sent to journalists can be found in appendix I .

³⁵ One of the journalists interviewed changed job at the beginning of 2012, although that fact does not affect this analysis.

³⁶ A list of the correspondents, the media and the country can be found in Appendix 2.

Because of the time limitation to carry out this research, a small example of seven journalists from different Western European countries has been used. There was just one editor interview for his point of view, and there was not quality control assessment about whether the quality of coverage did actually drop. All the concerns expressed about those issues are just based in the point of view of the journalists interviewed.

3.2 Summary of findings

Summits' attendance

Four of the seven journalists interviewed have covered in situ five or more climate summits, and three of them less than five. All of them travelled to Copenhagen to report about COP15. Six of the seven covered the last two conferences, Cancun and Durban, from their offices. One of them attended Cancun but not Durban.

Reasons given for not being sent

Asked why their editors decided not to send them to cover Durban, all the journalists agreed that one of the reasons was 'the lack of interest about climate negotiations'.

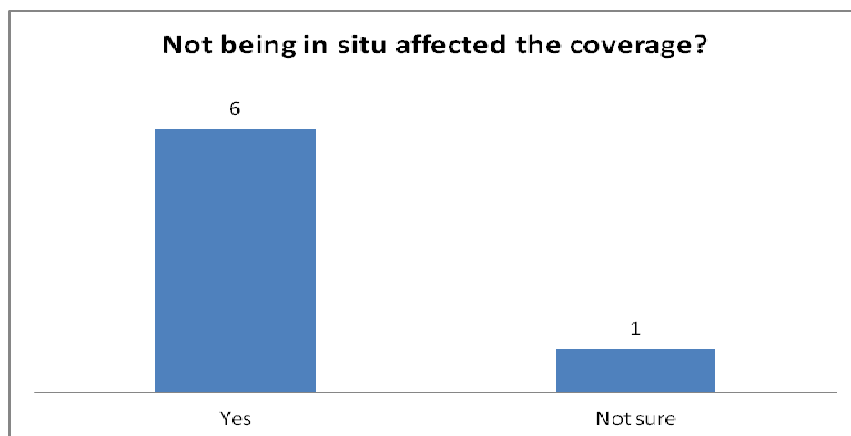
The motives given by their editors, to explain that lack of interest, were these:

	Number of journalists that mentioned this
Climate change was not in the 'highlights' when Durban took place	4
Climate change is not on the political agenda after Copenhagen	2
Public interest in the UNFCCC process has declined since 'the failure' of Copenhagen	2
Balancing Durban against so many other demands, it was not worth it	1

7. Reasons given for not being sent

The other reason given by six of the seven was the cost of the trip; and in these six cases their editors combined both factors: 'Because of low expectations, Durban was not worth the cost of sending a correspondent'.

How did the fact of not being in Durban affect the coverage?



8. Not being in Durban affected the coverage?

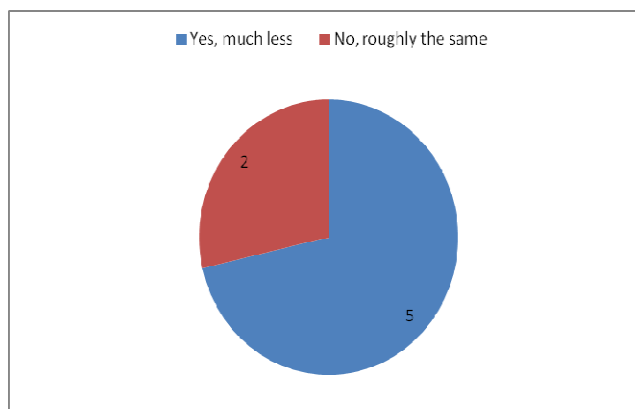
As this chart shows, six out of the seven interviewed were convinced that not being in Durban negatively affected their coverage. Immediate responses to this question included: ‘No doubt’, ‘Of course’ or ‘Absolutely’ in all the six cases. According to them, reporting about Durban without being there meant:

	Number stating this
Lack of accuracy	5
Less variety of sources	5
Poorer contextualization	4
Lack of understanding of the negotiations	4
No human stories	4
Less interviews with scientists, delegates, ONG speakers, etc	3
Lack of atmosphere	2
More necessity of reliability on national and UE political sources	2
Impossibility to engage the viewers/readers	2

By contrast, one of the seven answered that he was not sure whether not being in situ changed the way he broadcast about the summit. His justification for this was: ‘It is hard to be sure. Being distant may help a little, bizarrely, because there is always an extraordinary build-up of tension in the final hours and one can feel caught up in that, which makes it more difficult to provide a dispassionate assessment’³⁷.

Less stories as a result of not being there?

³⁷ The source for the quote is the BBC representative.



9. Less stories as a result of not being there?

The majority of the correspondents, 5 out of 7, confirmed that they broadcast or wrote less about Durban as a result of not being there, and two of them mentioned that because of not attending the summit, they just reported ‘the basic facts’ and ‘the result of the negotiations’, which means just two stories about a conference that lasted 14 days.

One of those interviewed added that when his editor sent him to cover the summits in situ, he was in the country for extra days in order to cover climate stories in that country and add more contextualization and background:

‘For instance, I went to Poznan or Copenhagen several weeks before the summits to report about issues related to climate change in Poland and Denmark. I aired pieces about Bialowieza Forest or the coal industry in Poland, and about wind farms, and coal plants in Denmark. After that, I covered those conferences in situ, with live stand-up stories. I did not air any climate change story about Mexico or South Africa when I covered Cancun and Durban from the office, and I only reported the basic facts of these two conferences’.

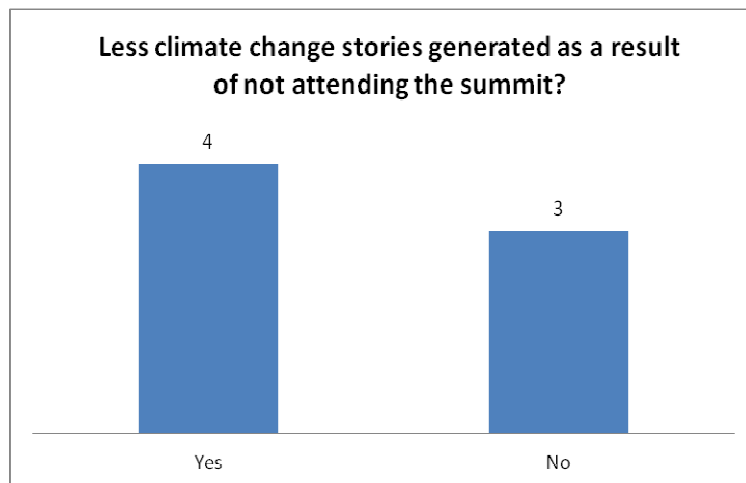
Conversely, two of the interviewees said they reported roughly the same number of pieces as when they travelled³⁸.

The journalists were also asked if not attending the summit meant fewer new ideas and information to generate stories about climate change during the year. As can be observed in the next graph, four people agreed with the statement that ‘climate change conferences are the best place to find information, sources and new ideas to generate stories about climate change after the summit’. According to them, it is ‘beyond doubt’ that not being in

³⁸ *ibid.*

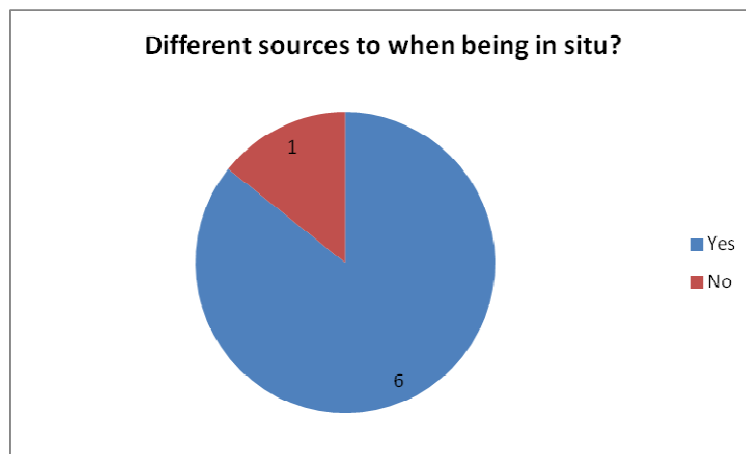
Durban meant that they will report less about climate change, in general, this year. Three of the people said that this was based on the experience of reporting less about global warming after not being at the Cancun summit.

By contrast, three of them believe that not attending Durban will not necessarily involve less climate change stories this year. One of them argued that she has been writing about climate change for twenty years –which means even before the first climate conference was held, so she does not need the summits to glean new ideas. Another two underlined that as their climate change stories are mainly based on published scientific research, not attending a conference does not necessarily imply less coverage about this topic during the year.



10. Less climate change stories generated as a result of not attending the summit?

Different coverage vs. different sources

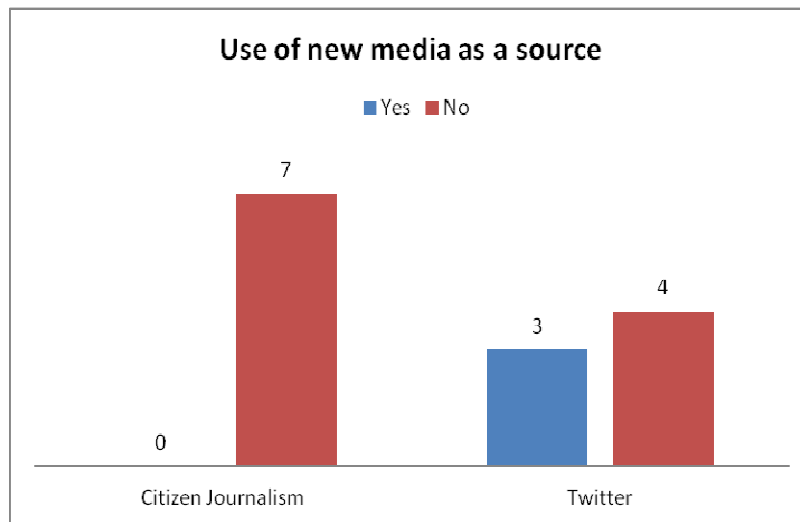


11. Different coverage vs. different sources

The majority of correspondents, who had covered the last climate summit from a distance (6 of 7), indicated that they used different sources from those they used when they attended the conference. Five of these six indicated that their primary sources to glean what was happening in Durban were pieces from international news agencies; and six of them agreed they relied more on phone calls to national sources (delegates, NGO, etc), whilst when they were there, they used more varied and international sources. In conclusion, all of them agreed that they employed less variety of sources and more national voices in their stories.

Only one person accessed the same sources to report on Durban, as when he was in situ, in previous summits.

Use of new media



12. Use of new media

Apparently new media, such as Twitter or citizen journalism, have become a new way of obtaining information about events, especially for those that cannot attend, as in the cases studied. However, the result of these interviews shows an extremely low use of new media to gather information about what was happening in Durban. None of the people interviewed used citizen journalism; and only three consulted twitter while the summit was taking place but more as a way of knowing the views of other known journalistic colleagues, who were in Durban, than as a source of information.

All of these three followed twitter accounts with same criteria during COP17:

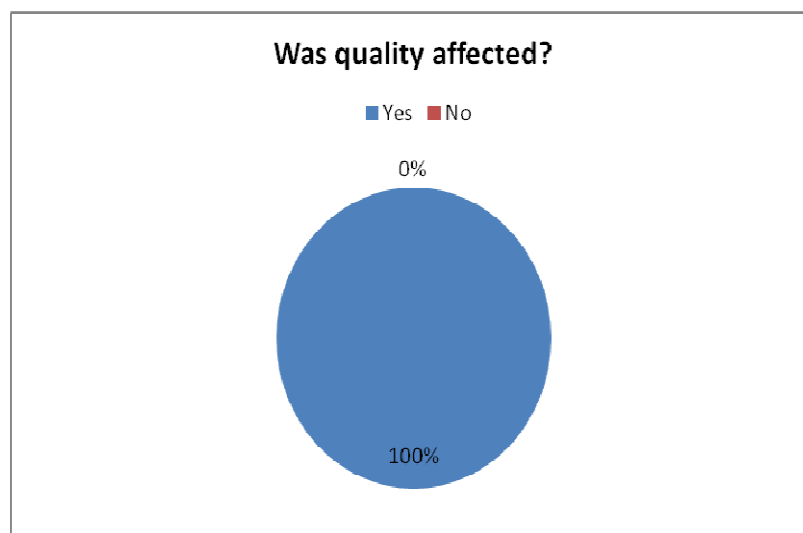
- Not as a primary source, but as a way of knowing what other known journalistic colleagues who were in Durban were saying.
- Only followed trusted Twitter accounts, which means they really know the person/people that are behind the tweets.

Some of the reasons given to explain the low use of twitter as a source of information are:

- The official accounts of the UNFCCC and delegates are 'too official' to gather what is really happening.
- The NGO often pushes out too much material on the basis of rumour and it can be a waste of time trying to sort out what is important.
- You cannot trust citizens reporting on Twitter as a source if you do not know the people tweeting.

In addition, none of them made use of Twitter to communicate what was happening in Copenhagen or in Durban, although all of them did have Twitter accounts on the second occasion.

Was quality affected?



13. Was quality affected?

There was a consensus among the reporters that the quality of the stories was lower for Durban because they were not there. In this sense, quality was poorer because:

- There was less context and nuances.
- It was more difficult for journalists to understand and explain the negotiation process.
- It was not possible to be totally accurate as you did not know all the details or had the 'global picture'
- Less variety of sources was used.
- It was difficult to determine what was important and what not.
- It was not possible to report vivid and human stories.

Journalists' responsibility for climate change being treated with less urgency

All the journalists consulted agree that climate change has not been treated with the same urgency after Copenhagen; and also that climate correspondents have some of the responsibility for this. These are the mistakes/issues caused by this approach:

- Treating climate change from a very alarmist and catastrophic view.
- Addressing the 'Climategate'³⁹ from a superficial and simplistic view.
- Giving too much space to climate sceptics whilst giving scientific information less priority.
- Failure to clarify to the citizen the importance of scientific issues compared to political statements by politicians and NGO representatives.
- Being exasperated and frustrated after the Copenhagen failure.
- The fact that politicians seem 'quite lame' after Copenhagen, partly because of the economic recession, but journalists could have changed the focus in their climate reporting, towards showing how different sectors in society are working with less impact. Assuming and establishing Copenhagen as a symbol of failure and giving up the battle in engaging the audience about its importance.

Nevertheless, 6 of the 7 blame editors for climate change not being treated with the same urgency in the media; and claim that editors and directors are the ones who have the power to decide what stories to do and broadcast. They think that environmental correspondents can only make proposals to cover certain events or investigate certain stories, try to convince the editor about its importance; and keep on reading and being interested in

³⁹ Climategate: When climate researchers at the UK's University of East Anglia were accused of manipulating data in research papers about climate change.

climate change. However, one said, 'we cannot oblige our editor to let us work on these stories or send us to cover them'.

One of them, who held editorial responsibilities, gives four reasons to understand editors' position:

'1. Editors saw how 100 world leaders gathered to discuss the subject at Copenhagen and failed to do much about it – So many people might fairly ask if the problem can be that bad?

2. The global economic situation has led to such immediate strains with unemployment, bank collapses and the threats to the euro that anything that runs on a longer scale, like climate change, is bound to get pushed down or off the agenda.

3. Newsroom interests wax and wane: sub-prime, terrorism and AIDS are all subjects that attract a lot of attention for a while, then drift, and then come back. Climate does get covered but only when there's a major new piece of science or significant new policy.

4. Budgets have become really tight and travelling to places like Greenland is incredibly expensive, so it's far harder to argue to make the trips'.

3.3 Discussion of the results

The majority of environmental journalists agree that being a climate reporter is like 'drinking from a fire hose every day', because you need to understand the science of climate change (which includes dealing with scientific uncertainty), agriculture, oceans, energy, politics, and economics... and all from a local and global perspective.

In addition, covering climate summits in situ, and explaining what is happening to an audience not necessarily familiar with these issues, is already an extremely complex task. There are parallel and hidden negotiations taking place at the same time, protests, scientific papers being presented, continuous press conferences and a tremendous buildup of tension surrounding it all. Besides, the language of the negotiations and the official papers is extraordinarily bureaucratic and technical, so it requires remarkable dedication to make the broader public understand what is really going on.

Because of this, the majority of climate correspondents interviewed agree that covering these conferences from a distance could weaken the struggle to engage the audience with the importance of these issues.

However, all their editors in seven European mainstream media, agreed that climate summits are not in 'the headlines' anymore, after COP 15 in Copenhagen. As expectations about these meetings are so 'low', it is not worth spending money to send a correspondent or a team abroad for at least one week.

For journalists, reporting these events from their desks means: less accuracy; lack of understanding of the negotiations; poorer contextualization; less variety of sources; a lack of atmosphere; fewer human stories and interviews; and the necessity to rely on national sources. As a result, all agreed that the quality of their stories was seriously affected by not being in situ - where the news was happening.

For most it has meant writing fewer stories about climate change international negotiations and related issues. In fact, 5 of 7 just submitted a couple of stories about Durban as a result of not being there i.e. the basic facts; the opening of the Conference; and the result of the negotiations. In 6 of the 7 cases, news agencies' pieces and phone calls, mainly to national speakers, were the main sources for their stories; in contrast, when they attended the summit, they drew on a wider variety of international sources.

By contrast, attending previous summits not only meant covering climate change issues before, during and after the conference, but also reporting about some local climate stories in the host country. In this sense, it can be argued that in most of the outlets these reporters represent, climate change has seen a dramatic reduction in coverage, both in terms of copy and minutes at least during the autumn period, when these international meetings take place.

Additionally, the lack of interest by editors in climate negotiations has been accompanied by less interest in the subject of climate change in general during the rest of the year, according to four of the journalists. The lack of interest in climate change by editors combined with less new ideas and sources about this issue by journalists -as a result of not attending the summit-, might represent a reduction in reporting about global warming this year; as happened in 2011 after the Cancun summit.

A surprising outcome from the interviews is the limited use being made of new media, such as citizen journalism or social networking, to find out what was happening in the Durban summit. They argued that with citizen journalism, especially with bloggers, not knowing who was 'behind the commentary' meant they felt that this was an unsafe source. In the case of Twitter, they felt that official accounts (as with the UNFCCC) were 'too official' whilst NGOs provided too much information, which caused some confusion and distraction from the main focus of interest, while the scientific accounts, on the contrary, provided very few. Additionally, although all the interviewees have Twitter accounts, only four consulted Twitter during Durban, and in all cases it was not to report about the Conference, or to glean information about what was occurring, but to find out what colleagues, who were attending, were saying on their accounts.

There is also a general consensus that environmental journalists have some responsibility for climate change not being treated with the same urgency after Copenhagen. They feel that some of their stories were too alarmist and more focused on potentially devastating consequences rather than possible local solutions; that in most of cases they overreacted to 'Climategate'; that too much space was given to climate skeptics; or that they did not appropriately balance the opinions given by Scientists and a Politicians - leaving their audience unclear as to which had more weight or merit.

Even though they were convinced that the difference in global warming will not be made at climate summits, even in 2015 or 2020 when a further summit as important as Copenhagen is expected⁴⁰, the majority of journalists interviewed thought that these conferences are still a valuable 'goldmine' of information, events and sources that can be used to generate later local and more human stories about what is considered the greatest challenge to our world. And just for that reason, they are well worth covering in situ.

⁴⁰Both rich and poor countries have agreed to negotiate a new regime by 2015, and to bring it into effect by 2020.

4. CONCLUSION

Inside the summits' press room...

For 15 years preceding the Copenhagen summit, towards the end of the autumn, climate change reporters in western countries travelled to different and exotic parts of the world to report about the international negotiations to address the problem of climate change.

In all those UN Conferences before Copenhagen, there was a minimal media representation from those countries considered the most vulnerable to rising seas and spreading deserts, and whose fate was to be decided at those meetings. This indicates that thousand of millions of citizens at risk were mainly uninformed about what the world's leaders were doing to cope with this problem or receive the latest updates about it. If we bear in mind that annual climate summits used to be the time when the coverage of climate change was at its peak during the year, does non-coverage by developing journalists mean that there was no news about global warming in general in the Global South? Several studies and analyses by expert journalists on this subject have suggested that the answer is 'yes'.

However, this trend started to change after Copenhagen, the first conference where reporters from developing countries were out in force. As this research has shown, the Danish meeting marked the end of the 'supremacy' of Western journalists, particularly European, in the press room.

A new trend has been observed in the two summits since then, in Cancun and Durban where the majority of journalists covering the summit are from the Global South. Even though it is obvious that the geographical location of the summit has influenced this result, it cannot be proven that this really made any difference: previous summits taking place in those continents, like Buenos Aires (COP10) or Nairobi (COP12), had a larger media presence from the Western world in spite of the significant number of journalists provided by the host country for the conference.

The question raised by this trend is whether more media attendance from the developing countries to these summits means more and better quality coverage in the whole Global South?

The impressive increase in media attendance from the developing countries is mainly attributed to the three 'giants': China, India and Brazil, followed by Bangladesh, South Africa and Mexico.

There were also more journalists from the 48 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Alliance of Small Islands States (Aosis) in Cancun and Durban than at any other conference before. Media representation from the LDCs and the Aosis still remains significantly low, taking into account their citizens are the most exposed to climate impacts such as droughts or inundation.

There was only one reporter accredited to cover the Durban summit from countries like Ethiopia, Mali, Tanzania or Bhutan, notwithstanding they are drought-prone states in the first two cases, long flat coastal in the third, and an Himalayan country with melting ice risks in the last. Likewise, none of the Caribbean islands had media representatives in Durban in spite of the fact that they are very vulnerable to sea level rises.

The hope in this field could be in the hands of initiatives like the one supported by organizations like Internews, Panos and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) that have sent a number of journalists from the developing world to the climate summits over the last five years. These journalists reported on everything during the summits from the extent of snow cover in the Himalayas to transport options in Indonesia.

The other question is whether the quality of climate change summit reporting has also improved in the developing countries. Although this is not the subject of this research, papers and articles analysed⁴¹ suggest that most of the journalists from developing nations attending these summits mainly focus their stories on economics and politics more than the science behind global warming and the consequences of climate change in general.

⁴¹ Mike Shanahan 'Time to adapt? Media coverage of climate change in non-industrialised countries' (Chapter 12 in the book 'Climate Change and the Media', published by Peter Lang Publishing in August 2009) or Mike Shanahan. *Why the Media Matters in a Warming World: A Guide for Policy Makers in the Global South* (Internews, PANOS and International Institute for Environment and Development. December, 2009).

And when they focus on the science, several studies⁴² stress that quality does not always remain adequate, and ignorance about the causes, and projected impacts, is widespread in the most vulnerable countries.

As the press officer for the IIED Mike Shanahan, underlines “Journalists in developing countries often have a mountain to climb when they trying to cover climate change`. Some of the obstacles are: lack of training to make climate change relevant and interesting, lack of access to research in journals and local scientific interviews, lack of resources to travel, and difficulties to convince insensitive editors who do not understand the importance of climate change at all.

In addition to this, and as Reporters without Borders alerted in a paper⁴³, there are many countries in the world, especially in poorer countries, in which climate change reporters who cover such things as illegal logging, pollution or any other controversial environmental issue, face dangers similar to their colleagues covering the crime beat. They are often jailed, beaten, threatened or censored.

Therefore, as the climate change challenge grows globally, it appears all the more important to step up all efforts in enhancing appreciation of the subject by journalists from the Global South, and to promote journalism training, access to coverage on climate summits in order to improve the quality and frequency of their reporting.

Outside the press rooms

Shanahan’s quote about reporters from the Global South having a mountain to climb to cover climate change could easily be applied now to most of the European climate correspondents as well.

A recent Eurobarometer⁴⁴ poll showed a majority of Europeans still believe there is solid scientific evidence for man-made climate change, considering it the second most important issue facing the world (after global poverty), and think Governments should be taking action.

⁴² E.g. James Fahn’s Rescuing Reporting in the Global South (Nature, July 2008).

⁴³ Reporters Without Borders. Call to Action to protect environmental journalists (December, 2009).

⁴⁴ Eurobarometer 372. Published by the European Commission in October, 2011:
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_372_en.pdf

In addition to media organizations downsizing and making budget cuts, climate correspondents in Europe face a 'mountain to climb' because of in a new media era outlets generally go for the news they compete with, instead of the news that makes the difference, and use a new notion of news defined only by the hour of the day.

As expectations were lower and there were far less heads of state attending Cancun or Durban, most of the mainstream European media editors decided not to send their climate reporters to Mexico or South Africa but asked them to cover it from afar.

The irony is that it was in Cancun and Durban that the final agreements there, though modest, were nevertheless more noteworthy than those reached in Copenhagen.

It would be interesting to see if these same outlets, particularly in countries where expectations to win the Euro Cup 2012 were very low, also decided to send less correspondents, or no correspondents at all, to cover the matches. We should reflect on the amount of space given to sports, famous people's anniversaries, weddings and divorces. (the celebration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in the UK, in comparison to the amount given to report about climate change during last year.

A point to take into consideration should be the conviction of the journalists interviewed about the quality of their reporting about the last climate summit being seriously affected by not being where news was happening. Particular attention should be paid to the danger that when reporting from a distance, information will be mainly based on official sources and will become propaganda, as the Greek journalist Nikos Megrelis⁴⁵ defends in his passionate documentary 'Shooting vs. Shooting'.

Few climate journalists believe that a difference in climate change will emerge from a global forum like UN summits, but more likely from action at the ground level. However, media presence in the places where decisions are taken seems to be necessary to help maintain pressure on governments and the attention of audiences on this issue.

Climate change summits are not comparable to the Iraq conflict, but fighting global warming and its impact is the most challenging war in our world. Thus, as in Iraq, we need

⁴⁵ Nikos Negrelis 'Shooting vs. Shooting' (2011) documentary feature film defends that journalists must be on the front line. Otherwise, the information will be left to the press releases and the videotapes from the propaganda machines on both sides.

journalists, cameramen and photographers in the place where things are happening to try to let the public at large know what is really happening.

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Appendix I Text of Questionnaire Sent to Journalists

1. How many climate change summits have you covered in situ; and how many from your country?
2. Why did you or your editor decide not to go/send you to cover Durban in situ?
3. Do you think that the fact of not being in situ changed the way you reported about the summit? If yes, in what way?
4. Did you write or broadcast less about the summit as a result of not being there?
5. Did you use the same sources as when you were covering the summit in situ?
6. If you did use different sources to know what was happening in Durban, could you mention which?
7. For example, did you use citizen journalism and social networks to gather information about what was happening in Copenhagen? And did you use them to cover Durban?
8. If yes, which bloggers and twitter accounts have you followed the most?
9. Did you use Twitter to communicate to your audience what was happening in Copenhagen? And did you use it during Durban?
10. Do you think the quality of your stories about Durban was affected by the fact that you were not there? If yes, in what ways?
11. Climate conferences used to be one of the best places to find information, sources and new ideas to generate stories about climate change after the conference. If you agree with this, does the fact that you did not go to Durban mean that you will send/write/broadcast less stories about this topic during this year?
12. Do you think climate change is treated with the same urgency after Copenhagen? If not, do you think journalists have any responsibility for this?

Appendix 2 List of Journalists Interviewed

Journalist	Media	Category	Country
Araceli Acosta	ABC	Daily newspaper	Spain
Carla Castelo	SIC Noticias	TV	Portugal
Dagmar Dehmer	Der Tagesspiegel	Daily newspaper	Germany
David Shukman	BBC	TV	United Kingdom
Jesper Ravn	Ritzau	News agency	Denmark
Nicolas Chateauneuf	France 2	TV	France
Susanna Baltscheffsky	Svenska Dagbladet	Daily newspaper	Sweden