

From Communication to Action

How to communicate to motivate women to act pro-environmentally?

Jana Plananska, PhD Candidate
Institute for Economy and the Environment, University of St.Gallen, Switzerland
jana.plananska@unisg.ch

Introduction

Climate change represents one of the main issues of today. Proven to be anthropogenic, mainly caused by extraction and burning of fossil fuels, there is an **urgent need to act** to limit its underlying causes. Despite increasing efforts by private and public actors alike, only a limited change in human behavior has been registered so far. One of the main reasons for this has concluded to be the **faulty climate change communication**. Based on erroneous assumptions about the nature of human behavior as fully rational and ineffectively set-up (being rather abstract, talking about the global implications of climate change and its catastrophic futures without providing any solutions and positive outlook), it freezes people to inaction rather than motivating them toward pro-environmental engagement.

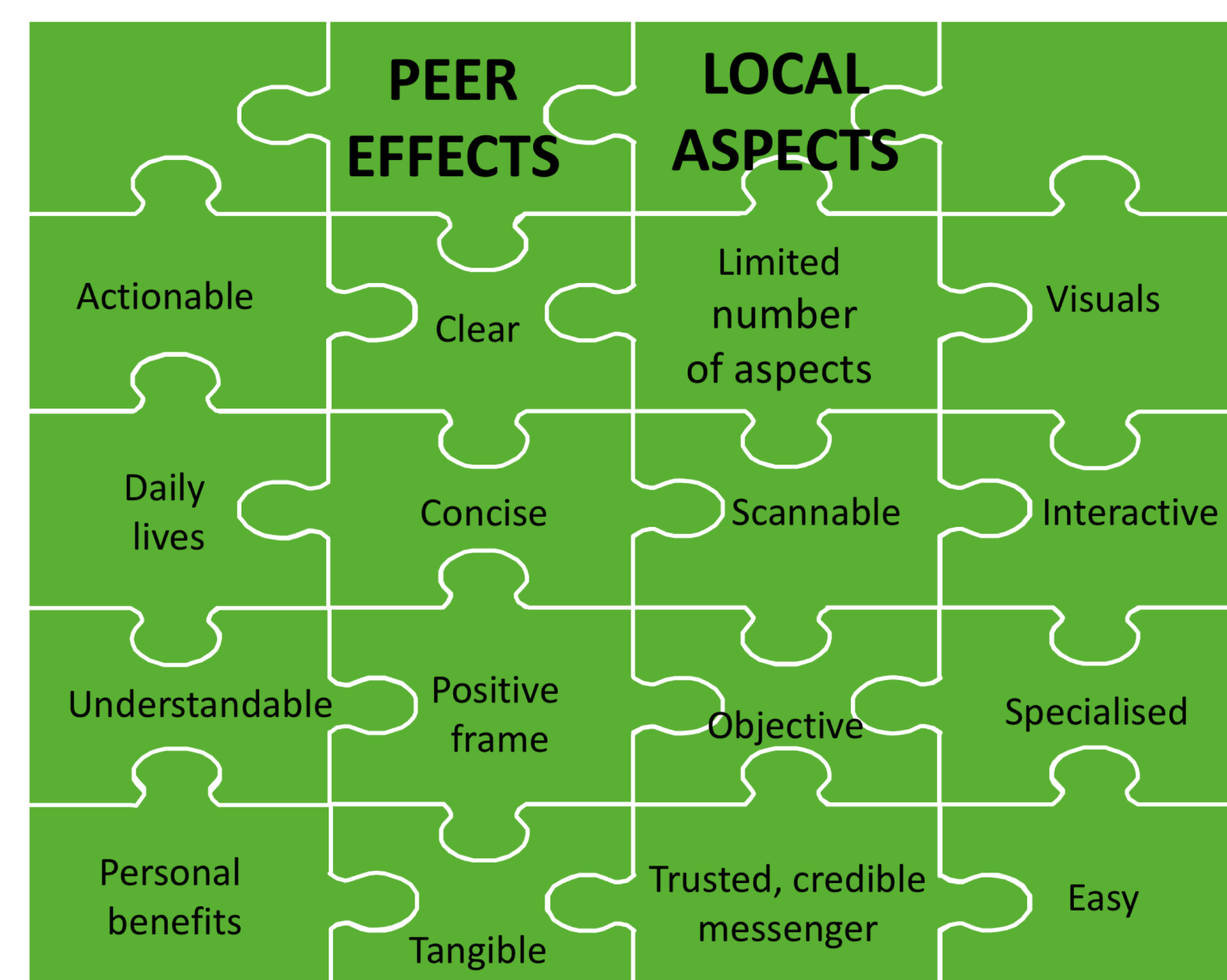


Research question

WHAT ASPECTS SHOULD THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY BE COMPOSED OF TO MOTIVATE PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION?

The background research showed the aspects a successful communication strategy should have (such as being tangible, actionable, specialized to a concrete target group and context), consequently hinting on a **potential conflict between their plurality and the need for conciseness**.

Aspects of a successful communication strategy

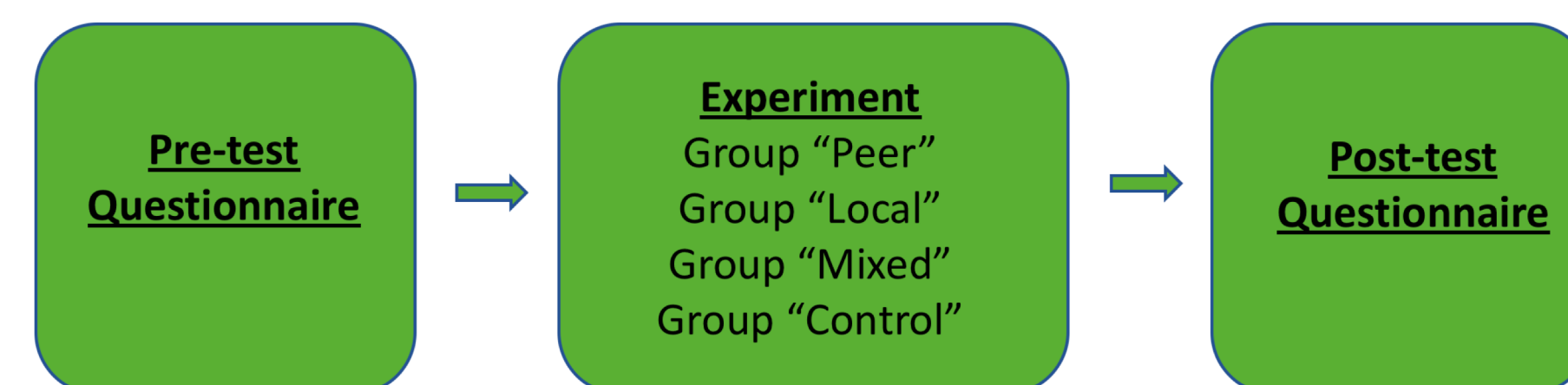


Research method

Experimental questions:

1. Is a **complex** or a **concise** strategy more effective to motivate intentions to act pro-environmentally?
2. If a **more concise** strategy proves more effective to motivate pro-environmental intentions, which of the two tested versions, a **peer effects-based** or a **local aspects-based** one?

3-stage experiment was conducted:



Variables chosen:

IV: Communication strategy

DV1: Intentions to shift to renewable energy mix

DV2: Intentions to shift to clean transport options

DV3: Voting intentions within the Referendum on Energy Strategy 2050, held in Switzerland on 21 May 2017

The differentiated impact of the strategies was tested by comparing the answers relative to dependent variables between the pre- and post-experimental questionnaires across time and experimental groups. To complete thus obtained data, an **eye tracking software** was implemented while exposing selected participants to the experimental strategies.

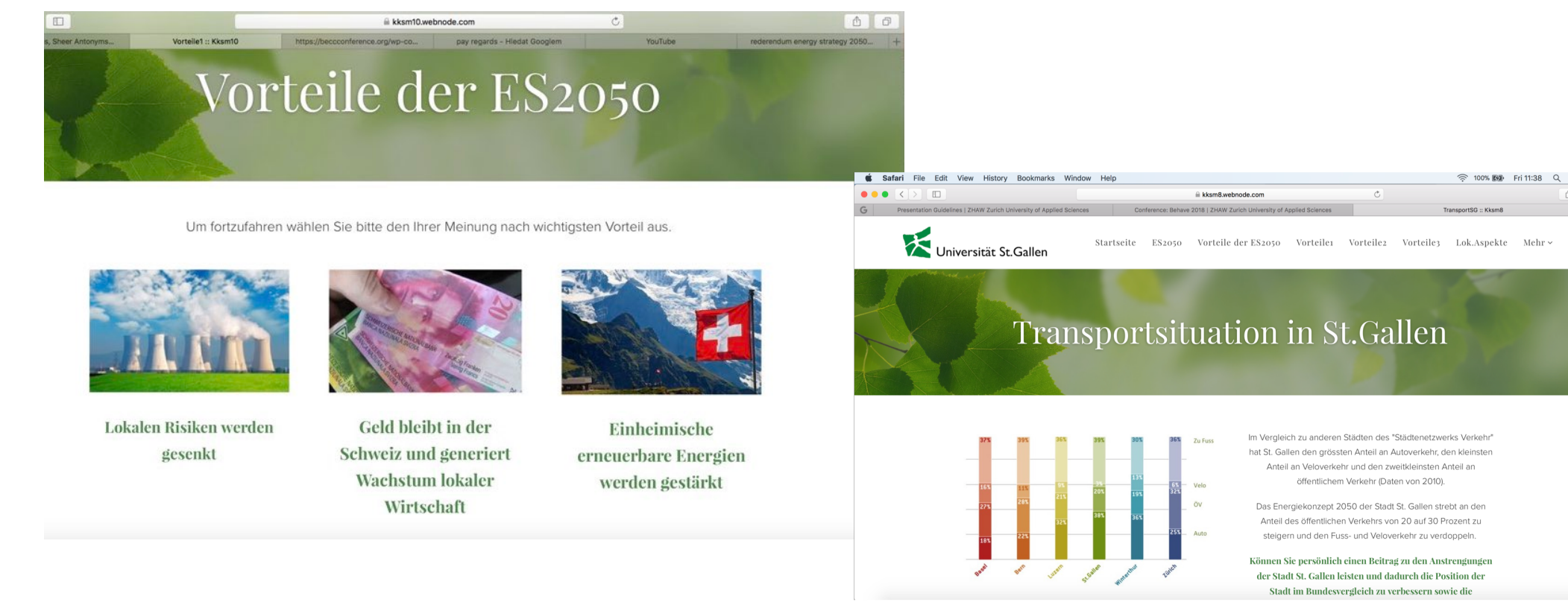


Illustration of the experimental strategies tested, presented as an online Website (<https://kksm10.webnode.com>, last access 04 October 2018).

Target Group: Female target group (students)

Reasons:

- Need for specialization
- Potential swing voter role in pro-environmental referenda in Switzerland

Results

Peer effects-based strategy proved to be the most effective across all tested variables and for female target group in particular, followed by local aspects based-strategy, mixed strategy and the control group. Consequently, it can be concluded that **concise communication strategies** are more effective than complex ones, with peer effects having the largest impact overall.

Reasons for the effectiveness of the peer effects-based strategy:

1. Conciseness

Strategy	Time (min)
Peer effects	5.84
Local aspects	7.90
Mixed	8.75

2. Corresponding to female values and worldviews

	Dominant value	Protection of environment is important because:	It is important for me:
Female	Care/ Prevent harm	1. It saves and assures resources for future generations 2. By that nature and animal species are protected	1. Live a meaningful live 2. Have a good work-life balance
Male	Frugality/ Responsi bility	1. It saves and assures resources for future generations 2. It delivers clean air and fruitful soil that assures higher quality of food	1. To assure economic stability and a high quality of life

3. Predominance of pictures and statements relative to people

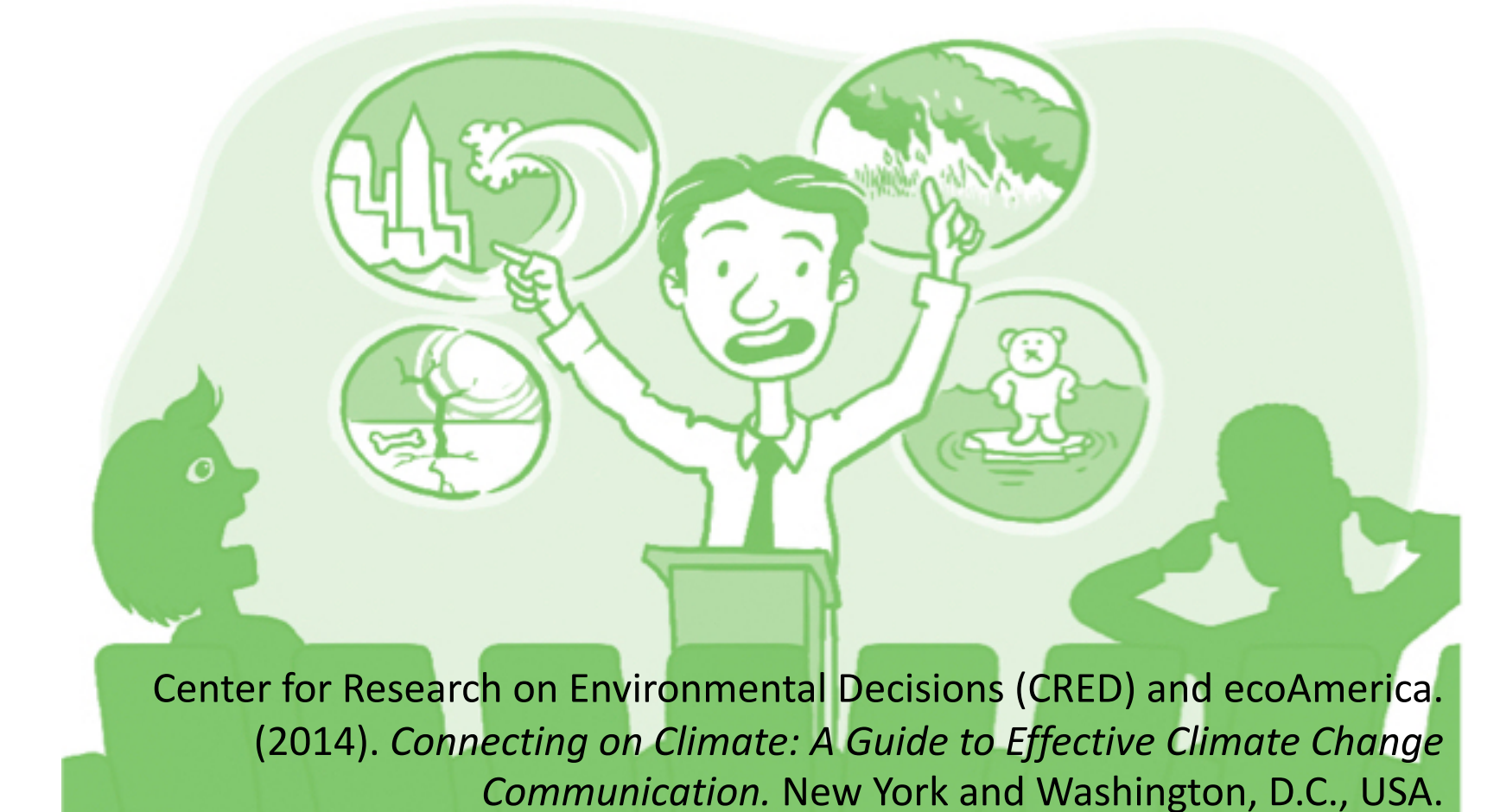


Frequency of gaze of a female (left) and male (right) participant; Advantages of Energy Strategy 2050, local aspects-based strategy (<https://kksm10.webnode.com/vorteilees2050/>, last access 03 October 2018).

Conclusions and further research

The present research contributes to the ongoing scientific debate on how exactly to set-up communication strategies to motivate pro-environmental behavior. Its results show that **concise**, namely **peer effects-based strategies**, are the most successful in motivating people's intentions to act pro-environmentally and vote in favor of pro-environmental initiatives. The peer effects-based strategies were the most effective in general and in particular in regard to women since they correspond to their deeply held values and worldviews.

These findings open-up for further research. Firstly, the role of differentiated framing within peer effects-based communication strategies and its impacts on additional target groups (such as men and non-students) could be analyzed. Secondly, the results generated could and should be implemented in practice, for example within one of the upcoming votes relative to pro-environmental initiative. This would bring additional insights as well as represent an ultimate proof of the relevance and applicability of presented results.



Acknowledgements

This research would like to thank the Behavioral Lab of the University of St.Gallen for the provision of facilities and the research grant to conduct the experiment. Moreover, the author would like to cordially thank Prof. Dr. Rolf Wüstenhagen for the kind supervision and valuable insights provided throughout the whole research process.

References

- Center for Research on Environmental Decisions (CRED) and ecoAmerica. (2014). *Connecting on Climate: A Guide to Effective Climate Change Communication*. New York and Washington, D.C., USA.
- Cook, J., & Lewandowsky, S. (2011). *The debunking handbook*. St. Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland.
- Jarreau, P. B., Altinay, Z., & Reynolds, A. (2017). Best Practices in Environmental Communication: A Case Study of Louisiana's Coastal Crisis. *Environmental Communication*, 11(2), 143-165.
- Moser, S. C., & Dilling, L. (2004). Making Climate Hot. *Environment: Sciences and Policy for Sustainable Development*, 46 (10), 32-46.
- Pelletier, L. G., & Sharp, E. (2008). Persuasive communication and proenvironmental behaviours: How Message Tailoring and Message Framing Can Improve the Integration of Behaviours Through Self-Determined Motivation. *Canadian Psychology*, 49(3), 210-2017.
- Rinscheid, A., & Wüstenhagen, R. (2016). Meinungsbildungsprozesse bei energiepolitischen Volksabstimmungen. *Universität St.Gallen*, Retrieved from <https://iwoe.unisg.ch/media/dateien/instituteundcenters/iwoe/news/aai-studie-rinscheid-wuestenhagen-2016.pdf> (last access 04 October 2018).