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Audrey Bails, Anna Lillebø, Theodora Paramana, Camille Parrod, Silvia Luís, Vincent Jolivet, Serafim Poulos, Camille Chanard, Nuno Rodrigues, Georges Alexandrakis, et al.

► To cite this version:

Audrey Bails, Anna Lillebø, Theodora Paramana, Camille Parrod, Silvia Luís, et al.. Current adaptation practices: case studies in France, Portugal and Greece. Our Common Future Under Climate Change: International scientific conference, Jul 2015, Paris, France. hal-01142561

HAL Id: hal-01142561

<https://brgm.hal.science/hal-01142561>

Submitted on 15 Apr 2015

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Current adaptation practices: case studies in France, Portugal and Greece

A. Baills (1) ; A. Lillebø (2) ; T. Paramana (3) ; C. Parrod (4) ; S. Luís (5) ;

A. Stépanian (6) ; G. Le Cozannet (7)

(1) BRGM, ORLEANS, France; (2) University of Aveiro, Department of biology & cesam, Aveiro, Portugal; (3) National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Faculty of Geology and Geoenvironment, Laboratory of physical geography, Athens, Greece; (4) Acteon, Colmar, France; (5) ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Libon, Portugal; (6) BRGM, Marseille, France; (7) BRGM / CNRS, BRGM-DRP-R3C / CNRS-LGP (UMR-8591), Orleans, France

Abstract content

The warming of the climate system is now unequivocal and a strong warming of air temperature as well as an acceleration of sea-level rise is projected in the Mediterranean regions of Europe (IPCC, 2013). At the same time, adaptation measures are being set up to cope with the impacts of those changes on both the environment and the society. To which extent do these adaptation policies actually meet the challenge posed by future climate change? To answer this question, a detailed understanding of the current practices of adaptation is needed, as well as a comprehensive view of how this adaptation is perceived by its main actors. However, such information is lacking at present. Therefore, a literature review has been combined with 47 semi-structured interviews conducted on three coastal sites in France, Portugal and Greece, where different approaches toward risk prevention and adaptation to climate change are in place. In order to identify gaps between the theoretical framework and the practical situation at local scale; the interviewees have been asked with their general knowledge of climate change (present and future changes) and on the existing and desirable adaptation policies / measures.

The interviews and the literature review underline similarities and differences in the countries approaches, organization and awareness. France, Portugal and Greece have different level of national policies development regarding climate adaptation and climate change awareness can be influenced by local in situ situations. But even when climate change and climate adaptation are subjects of concern, a lack of concrete "local" implementation is pointed out by stakeholders, as very few adaptation measures have been implemented yet. Indeed, climate adaptation is recognized as a traversal issue by the interviewees. Hence, related policies have to fit within already developed and complex sectorial legal frameworks related to water management, risk prevention, health, environment and so forth.

Literature review and stakeholders interviews both highlight the time scale issues related to difference between climate change and political mandate's time horizons. They also stress a gap between science and non-scientific local stakeholders for expected knowledge and actions, and this gap tends to be reinforced by the complexity of the legal framework for climate adaptation. This complexity is particularly pointed out by interviewees acting at regional and local scales in France, which is the country where adaptation to climate change has been the most considered in various regional sectorial policies.

To overcome these specific barriers to adaptation, the interviewees suggested that one first step could be the creation of interest groups at regional level, gathering all concerned actors and a complementary lead could be to adopt laws at the national level to incite local authorities to act together with regional actors. The next step would then be to design adaptation measures and to assess their efficiency.

This work has received funds from the ADAPT-MED project (CIRCLE2-MED).

Number: **000547**

Speaker: **A. Baills**

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Daily theme : **Theme Day 2: Landscapes of Our Common Future**

Parallel Session theme suitable for your abstract : **40 - Co-production of Knowledge**

Type of presentation : **Oral**

Publication : **no**

Keywords (enter at least 1 keyword, max 4) :

- semi-structured interviews
- adaptation policies

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Updated on: **Tuesday, February 24, 2015 2:59 PM**