



capitalising climate change knowledge for adaptation in the alpine space



Climate Adaptation Policies, Governance and the Science-Policy Interface in Alpine Countries and Regions

Country Report France

Deliverable of WP4 in the C3-Alps project

**Eve Leroy & Georges-Marie Saulnier
(Université de Savoie)**

April 2013

funding programme



www.c3alps.eu

info@c3alps.eu

Recommended citation

Leroy, E., & Saulnier, G.M. (2013): Climate Adaptation Policies, Governance and the Science-Policy Interface in Alpine Countries and Regions. Country Report France. Deliverable of WP4 in the C3-Alps project.

Organisation

Université de Savoie (UdS)

**Authors**

Eve Leroy,
Georges-Marie Saulnier

Contact

Leroy Eve, Université de Savoie,
73376 Le Bourget du Lac Cedex
France

eve.leroy@univ-savoie.fr

+33 47975 8585

Delivery date

30th of April 2013

Status

Final Report

Distribution level

Public

www.c3alps.eu



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1 Executive Summary

This study is part of the review of climate change adaptation (CCA) policies, done in the WP4, which aims to identify strengths and weaknesses of CCA policy making and governance in the Alpine Space. Results give an overview of the state of CCA policy making and governance in the Alpine Space and should be a basis to develop recommendations for CCA policies improvement. The study was conducted in seven different countries. Results for France are presented below.

France has developed some strategic documents about CCA for a couple of years. Compare with other Alpine Space countries, France has a significant number of policy documents dealing with CCA. Five documents from national to regional level were specifically targeted to conduct the study even if the global French CCA policy field was also addressed.

Three different methods were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy development process and the strengths and weaknesses of the CCA policy framework in France: a short document analysis, an online survey and personal interviews.

Results show that CCA development process is well engaged in France with integration of CCA principles in all the concerned sectors at different levels of governance. Nevertheless even if CCA policy documents explain well the principles and benefits of CCA and clearly identify actions and key actors, they miss to support concrete implementation of CCA measures at the local level at the moment.

The role of science in the development process of a CCA policy is often perceived as a good way to assess and illustrate the climate change impacts.

This study by reviewing the characteristics of the CCA policy development and the science-policy interface in France aims at a general reflection about the CCA policy framework in the Alpine Space in order to improve it.



2 Goals and methods

In France policy documents on climate change adaptation (CCA) exist for a couple of years. The aim of this report is to analyse how these documents treat climate change adaptation issues and how they influence practical actions on the ground.

2.1 Documents analyzed

Five documents were selected to represent the legal framework of CCA in France:

two from the national level

- Le Plan National D'Adaptation au Changement Climatique (PNACC) = Climate Change Adaptation National Plan
- Le Plan d'Adaptation de la Gestion de l'eau dans l'Agriculture = Water management in agriculture national adaptation plan

one from the interregional level

- Convention interrégionale pour le massif des Alpes = Interregional Convention for the Alps Massif

two from the regional level

- Schéma Régional Climat Air Energie (SRCAE) = Regional Climate Air Energy Scheme
- Changement Climatique, comment s'adapter en Rhône-Alpes? = How to Adapt to Climate Change in the Rhône-Alpes region?

2.2 Methods

Three different methods were used to analyse the French CCA policy.

- With a policy document analysis the goals, principles and instruments proposed in each document were identified; also whether uncertainty, mainstreaming and evaluation was addressed in the documents was assessed with the document analysis. This analysis helps to identify to whom the policy document is directed (e.g. agriculture, local community etc.), what kind of CCA actions is promulgated and to some degree how the policy was created.



- An online survey was sent to stakeholders involved in CCA policy documents. This survey had the purpose to collect stakeholders' perceptions of the CCA policy document drafting process and the so far accomplished impacts of the policy (document). With this online survey, stakeholders can explain the strengths and weaknesses of a policy document and related processes. Each respondent answered for just one document.
- The last method was an interview with few chosen stakeholders. In France, six interviews were conducted along an interview guide. Interviews were held with representatives of the following institutions: Institut de la Montagne (Mountain Institute), ONERC (Observatoire National des Effets du Réchauffement Climatique = National Observatory of Climate Change Impacts), Communauté de Commune de l'Oisans (Oisans District planning Authority), Mission Développement Prospective 73 (Prospective Development Mission of the Savoie), Conseil Général 73 (Departmental Council of the Savoie), la Régie des eaux de Megève (Megève Water municipal owned company). The aim of the interviews was to go deeper in the strengths and weaknesses of a policy document and to release bad and good practices in order to help the future development of CCA policy and governance including the legal framework for CCA.

3 Description of the situation (status quo)

The three methods bring different results. The policy document analysis shows that only four of five documents are really dealing with CCA. The “SRCAE” does not explicitly deal with CCA but more with climate change mitigation. Therefore, the French team firstly decided to omit the SRCAE from the list of CCA policy documents. However one interviewee later explained that this document could be an effective way to introduce CCA actions on the local level. Due to this statement the French team decided to keep the SRCAE as a CCA policy document even though the document does not explicitly addresses CCA but mainly deals with mitigation.

The online survey did not receive a great success in the opinion of the appealed people. The survey was sent to more than 400 people that were more or less closely related to CCA. However, despite two reminders, only 24 individuals answered the online survey and just 5 of them are of use, as the remaining 21 individuals skipped too many questions.

This low response rate could be explained by the length of the survey combined with the very precise questions about the policy document and the associated process. These characteristics may have discouraged many respondents. Recommendation on this point will be discuss at the end of this report.

Nevertheless, the online survey shows that most French stakeholders are not familiar with the CCA policy documents. Therefore it supposes that the effectiveness of such documents should be low on the ground. The feeling is that CCA is wanted by national government and regional institutions, therefore policy documents are well developed on this topic but at local level the implementation or even reflection on the topic in some cases is still not started. CCA policies development seems to be more top-down at the moment in France and the spread out of the ideas at local level may be a challenge.

The interview results are more conclusive. The French team managed to interview six people from national, departmental and local levels. Learning from the difficulties of the online survey, the interview guide was adapted to a more suitable form to the French context. By this process interesting information were drawn about strength and weakness of CCA in different fields and at different levels of governance even if not all the precise questions in the questionnaire were filled.

Generally the French policy framework for adaptation aims to integrate CCA in existing local plans (e.g. water drinking management plan, urban planning plan, sanitization plan, agricultural plan etc.). By this way, each time plans are updated/revised (often every 5 years but it could be more) CCA actions and measures have to be included. At the moment, CCA measures are voluntary in France but will be more and more mandatory as plans will be revised.



4 Characteristics of policy documents

In two of the selected French policy documents about CCA both strategy and oriented actions are developed in different sections in the same document. The goal is to explain why CCA is needed, thus to raise awareness, and then to show how it is possible to implement measures. Two documents (PNACC and *Changement Climatique comment s'adapter en Rhône-Alpes*) aim to clearly define what CCA is and why it is a necessity. Then these documents expose concrete actions with defined institutions to support and undertake it.

The PNACC, which is the national policy document about CCA, goes deeper in the CCA implementation and identifies in different sectors what actions should to be done and by whom. It is a big step that has been made on the way of adaptation but at the moment these recommendations are not well relayed at local level therefore not known by stakeholders and thus not yet implemented. Nevertheless, the PNACC seems to be a very helpful document to implement concrete adaptation measures.

Two documents (*Convention interrégionale pour le massif des Alpes* and *Plan d'adaptation à la gestion de l'eau en agriculture*) are more financially oriented. Financial supports are listed for CCA measures in different fields e.g. water management or tourism. The concept of adaptation in itself is not presented. The *Plan d'Adaptation à la gestion de l'eau en agriculture* also aims to change the legal framework in the water management sector in order to help adaptation measures.

The last document (SRCAE) is not directly dealing with adaptation but more with mitigation. Nevertheless this plan is interesting because it is the only one with an explicit long term view (2020 – 2050) and it could be a way to introduces CCA at local level as explained by an interviewee.

Not all the documents explicitly use scientific knowledge to talk about CCA. The most common use of science in the documents is to present evidences of CC especially for the temperatures and water resources. Scientific studies are sometimes also initiated to find appropriate measures to deal with CCA (e.g. crops diversification).

During an interview, two documents were proposed as interesting for the C3-Alps reflection:

- Livre Blanc - adaptation au changement climatique : vers un cadre d'action européen = White paper – adapting to climate change : towards an European framework for action from the European Commission. This document presents the European reflections about CCA and is therefore interesting for the level of governance it represents.
- PRAD (Plan Régional de l'Agriculture Durable) = Regional Plan for Sustainable Agriculture. This document is a new plan (2012 – 2019) which interacts with other strategic plans to implement adaptation measures in the agricultural sector. It appears to be more interesting than the selected document Plan d'Adaptation à la gestion de l'eau en agriculture and it could help to include it in the WP4 reflections.

4.1 Characteristics of the external factors/ setting influencing the possible emerging policy field of CCA

4.1.1 Facilitating factors

Most of the interviewees explain that mandatory measures are more effective to implement CCA. These obligations have to be integrated into local urban planning documents (PCET, Plan Climat Energie Territoire = Climate Energy Territorial Plan and SCoT, Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale = Territorial Consistency Scheme when existing or PLU, Plan Local d'Urbanisme = Local Urban Planning Plan). An example of useful mandatory measures given by some interviewees is in the water resources field where taxes will soon be charged if the reduction of water leaks in the network and measures to decrease water consumption are not done. Nevertheless, these kind of mandatory measures are still in progress now and not implemented yet.

Some interviewees highlight that the regulatory framework done for CCA helps to introduce and include CCA as concrete measures because all the legal tools are ready. Two laws (Grenelle I and Grenelle II) defined CC as a priority and help to establish CCA measures.

Another facilitating factor which has to be emphasised is the social acceptance of CCA measures. When citizens would be completely convinced of the necessity and benefits of CCA measures, the policy field would be highly pushed and helped.



4.1.2 Hindering factors

The external most hindering factors are of politic and financial nature. Stakeholders' willingness and rivalry between actors were often mentioned as hindering factors by the interviewees. Also, this lacking willingness is reinforced by the financial cost of adaptation. Elective representatives often have priorities that do not include the topic of adaptation and they prefer to allocate their resources to (more) visible actions.

Another hindering factor highlights by an interviewee is the lack of training of stakeholders about CC knowledge. Long-view planners should have access to information of CC knowledge and trainings. This should help their global understanding on the topic and thus acceptance of CCA measures.

4.2 Characteristics of the policy development process

4.2.1 Traditional conflicts re-emerging

The policy development process does not appear to be a source of conflict in itself. What is challenging for this development process is the dialogue between institutions that often have overlapping competences which are not always well defined. Therefore it is sometimes difficult to find an appropriate approach and good interlocutors to develop a policy.

Another challenge of the policy development process is to integrate different action levels while taking into account the specificity of a territory. At the moment the CCA policy development process is essentially introduced by the government and partly by the regions so it is mostly a top-down willingness. However most of the financing of adaptation, preparation and implementation of concrete measures have to be done at the local level. Therefore it is inevitable to better involve the local level of public administration and government with their realities in the policy development process for an effective CCA implementation.

In order to enable the general public and stakeholders at the local level to support CCA policy and not to reject it is also important to explain and train people about the usefulness of CCA.

4.2.2 Policy goals competing with CCA policy goals

Competition between CCA policy goals and other policy goals were only illustrated with regard to water consumption in this study. This explanation is detailed in this part because it could be a good example of policy goals competing with CCA.

In France it is the municipal council which legally sets the price of water in its municipality but it is a municipal owned water company = MWC (or a private company with a public service delegation contract) which has the responsibility of municipal water management. It is also legally sets that

the MWC can only be financed by charges on water consumption. This legal framework of water financings competes with CCA goals. The two following examples will illustrate it.

- 1) In the water management sector an easy CCA measure to implement is to reduce the water network leaks which means to improve the network efficiency. This measure needs financial means to update the network pipes, reservoirs etc. This cost has to be supported by the MWC that is with the charges on water consumption. When this funding is not sufficient the only way to get it is to increase the price of water and thus the incomes of the MWC. However as the price of water is a sensitive topic for municipal electoral campaigns it is rare that a mayor (who wants most of the time to be re-elected) takes this difficult decision. This situation often introduces an inadequacy between the price of water and the need of funding for the MWC to input CCA measures.
- 2) The other contradiction which can be raised with the legal framework of water financings is the following: if a MWC invests to reduce the water consumption as a CCA measure, its gains would systematically drop because citizen and industries would consume less (remember that MWC are financed by charges on water consumption). If the water consumption would decrease, the revenue of MWC would decrease. Therefore it is not in the interests of the MWC to reduce water consumption which competes with CCA policy goals. A way to counterbalance the loss of incomes introduced by a CCA measures would be to increase the price of water. Nevertheless in this case the municipal council would have to explain to the customers why if users reduced their water consumption, their water bill would increase.

The legal context of the water fixing price and the funding system of MWC compete with CCA logic.

Another challenge for CCA policy making in the field of water management is the obligation of municipalities to deliver water 24 hours a day and seven days a week once a house is connected to the municipal water network. This obligation causes a main issue in some French ski station where some luxurious chalets consume in two weeks more than four times the water of a classical four-people family house in a year and this taking happens during the period of low water. However, even when such evident abuses of water consumption occur, the water municipal company has not the right to reduce the water inputs of these chalets if the mayor does not enforce a municipal by-law. As people who can afford having such a chalet are important for cities depending on tourism due to the money they spend in the city shops and due to the image they give to the ski station, mayor sometimes delay taking a municipal by-law in favour of environmental needs.

4.3 Characteristics of the science-policy interface

Regarding the role of science the aspect most emphasised in the policy documents and interviews was 'knowledge generation'. Science creates consistent knowledge/information for stakeholders or/and policy makers, which help them to make the best or more informed decisions. Science brings scientific consistency into the policy-making process and helps stakeholders to leave their daily issues in order to have an overview over the main issues related to CC.

Most policy documents use science to explain why CCA is needed and to illustrate the potential impacts of climate change. Some of the policy documents go deeper in the science-policy interface and indicate that science might help to find suitable adaptation strategies and to regularly update the knowledge about CC especially at the local level.

Uncertainties are not often communicated to avoid giving an excuse for inaction. The best way to deal with the kind of reaction: "if CC impacts are not sure why should I take a decision now?", is to explain that decisions are always taken in an uncertain context. If the context is 100% certain then there is no need to make a decision which is obvious. Stakeholders always take decision in an uncertain context. A parallel with the uncertainties in the economical world can be used as an example. Moreover, there are enough strong certainties of CC to realise valuable actions.

The interviewees expressed three ideas for a better integration of scientists during the policy development process. The first idea is to create a new institution that would make the link between scientists and stakeholders. Experts, who know both universes, would make the link. The second idea was to outsource the science-policy interface. This means that funding would be allocated to specific research sectors (the more usable for public administrations) and not to a global research program. This would likely, so the hope, speed up specific knowledge generation and lead to more focused policy development process. The third idea is to train to CCA topics, every people included in the policy development process from the citizen to the higher stakeholder. This would guarantee that CCA information is well understand by all and thus well used.

4.4 Impacts of CCA related activities

One insight we derived from interviews and online survey was the gap between the CCA policy framework and implementation on the ground. In France many documents exist which explain adaptation and give the tools to integrate adaptation principles in different policy sectors. Nevertheless, at the local level these documents are not used or even known. Therefore, the impacts of CCA policy on awareness or practices are not tangible at the present day. Much work has to be done in France to spread the CCA tools/documents in order to have real impacts of the CCA policy process.

4.5 Strengths and weaknesses

The strength of CCA policy making and governance is the interest of the French government and regional councils in CCA. Great efforts have been done to create a global framework which aims to support every will in the way of adaptation with a good national strategy and well identified actions and actors. The dialogue is in the core of the policy development process which helps to take into account all points of view and to explore different possibilities.

However the weakness of CCA policy and policy-making in France is that even if legal tools are available the action depends on the willingness of stakeholders to engage. These stakeholders, however, have other—more pressing—concerns. The national framework implies no obligations to undertake CCA actions at the moment. It must be a voluntary approach. As CCA is still optional, there is no priority for CCA related policy-making or implementation at the municipal level.

Another weakness evocated several times is the difficult interaction/dialogue between all the actors. CCA forces dialogues which cost time and energy. Nevertheless this step is the only way to obtain a well-accepted policy.



5 Conclusions, recommendations, policy options

In conclusion this study helps to highlight how policy adaptation are developed and perceived in France.

From the point of view of the form of the study, the online survey did not suit very well with the French context. It appears that most French stakeholders/actors are not well aware of these quite new CCA policy documents. As the form of the online survey was quite long and with precise questions most people who do not know well the document (or do not know them at all) seem to have decided to not answer the questionnaire or to drop out. One of our partner explained that stakeholders and in particular elected representatives do not like to be hard-pushed to answer a question. As a consequence an elective representative/stakeholder who does not know the policy document very well would avoid appearing 'stupid' by not answering the questions than risking giving a wrong answer. We suggest more open questions to collect actors' information in the French adaptation field.

For the interviews, the difficulty was to find suitable people available and capable to answer our precise questions about the legal framework. Most of the policy document writing process is done at a high level of governance (national and regional) and therefore it may be hard to catch people really involve in the writing process. This required time and a good professional network. At this point the C3-Alps consortium was helpful in particular to reach the French national level.

For the document analysis conducted, two more documents were suggested by an interviewee to analyse and we think this could help the WP4 conclusions to include them.

From the point of view of the content of the study, France is well engaged in CCA policy development process. Nevertheless a big step has to be done to spread the messages at local level in order to implement effectively adaptation actions. At the moment reflections are undertaken to find the best level of governance and the best strategic document to implement CCA on a territory as a crucial step. At national level, the PNACC is in its evaluation phase which will bring feedbacks from the local level and help to revise the national plan taking into account this information. At the departmental level the CG 73 (departmental council of Savoie) pushes the municipalities to group themselves in order to share the means (financial and material) for a concrete and sustainable implementation of adaptation measures. This municipal group level (named communauté de communes = association of municipal authorities) seems to be the best one to implement on the ground adaptation measures because they share the same geographical, economical, demographic, political, etc., context. At present day, local municipalities are revised there different municipal plans (water management plan, urban planning plan, etc.) and try to include CCA as asked by the national plan. Nevertheless this step is a challenge for the municipalities because of the lack of funding, willingness or competences.



Rivalry and political blocks have to be circumvented with dialogues between actors and training about climate change. This would help the global understanding of the situation and the acceptance of stakeholders, and therefore the implementation of concrete measures. Nevertheless this process implies a high consumption of time and energy.

Emphasizes the economic benefits of CCA is often a good way to introduce measures. By this way CCA is not perceived as a constraint which will cost money but more as a win-win action good for the economy and the image of a city.

An updated strategy of spread CCA also has to pay attention to the topic of social acceptance of CCA. Raises awareness of citizens would likely lead to social acceptance of CCA and consequently would lead to raise the involvement of stakeholders. Scientists play a crucial role in explaining and illustrating climate change impacts and the necessity of adaptation by creating tailored knowledge and tools. Attention has to be paid to the presentation of information, so it is well understood at the local level.