



New tool helps evaluate regional plans for climate change adaptation

Adapting to climate change requires policymakers to negotiate the complex web of effects it will have on the environment and human health. A new internet-based tool could help policymakers understand these effects and choose appropriate adaptive measures for their local and regional development plans.

Climate change will have major impacts on the environment and human health within the next few decades. Adapting to climate change at local and regional levels will require policymakers to make decisions based on many different effects. In order to make the most appropriate decisions, policymakers will need to understand how these effects are interrelated.

A new internet-based tool called an 'adaptation scan' is designed to help policymakers factor the effects of climate change into their decision-making plans. The scan includes local climate change scenarios and effects for specific areas and provides adaptive measures to deal with both positive and negative effects.

Developed in The Netherlands, the adaptation scan helps policymakers pinpoint risks and possibilities posed by climate change within their area. It consists of two linked databases – one containing effects and one containing measures. These effects and measures interact in complex ways. For instance, one direct effect of climate change could be higher water levels in canals as a result of increased rainfall during winter. One adaptive measure in this case could be precautionary draining to avoid flooding. Indirect effects arising from this might include restricted shipping, as a result of closed waterways.

In a pilot study, consultants evaluated a draft regional development plan put together by authorities in Groningen, in the north east of the Netherlands. They selected the 18 most relevant impacts of climate change on health and the environment in the area and used the scan to identify areas where adaptive measures were lacking and to make recommendations as necessary. Many of the measures already in place in Groningen were not suited to tackling the predicted effects, and the scan helped identify measures that had been proven elsewhere which could be added to the plan.

At present, the scan covers 22 physical changes, 250 effects and 100 adaptive measures of climate change and there are plans to extend its range even further. The researchers say that although the current scan is designed for The Netherlands, it could be used as a model for other EU countries. However, they stress that to ensure the best results, input is needed from people with local expertise. Although the scan can provide a framework for policy making, the adaptive measures should be considered in combination with careful research and cost-benefit analyses. The scan will be publically available in early 2009.

Source: Schneider, H.C., Bijl, K., Van Cranenburgh, S. *et al.* (2008). The Dutch Adaptation Scan for Local Authorities. ENS8/ECAC7 Abstracts. 5: EMS2008-A-00647.

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