

Experience of the Paris Research Consortium Climate-Environment-Society

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It is now widely recognized that the complexity of climate change issues translates itself into a need for interdisciplinary approaches to science. This allows to first achieve a more comprehensive vision of climate change and, second, to better inform the decision-making processes. However, it seems that willingness alone is rarely enough to implement interdisciplinarity. The purpose of this presentation is to mobilize reflexivity to revisit and analyze the experience of the Paris Consortium for Climate-Environment-Society.

The French Consortium Climate-Environment-Society aims to develop, fund and coordinate interdisciplinary research into climate change and its impacts on society and environment. Launched in 2007, the consortium relies on the research expertise of 17 laboratories and federation in the Paris area working mainly in the fields of climatology, hydrology, ecology, health sciences, and the humanities and social sciences.

As examples, economists and climatologists have studied greenhouse gas emission scenarios compatible with climate stabilization goals. Historical records have provided both knowledge about past climate change and vulnerability of societies. Some regions, as the Mediterranean and the Sahel, are particularly vulnerable and already have to cope with water availability, agricultural production and even health issues. A project showed that millet production in West Africa is expected to decline due to warming in a higher proportion than observed in recent decades. Climate change also raises many questions concerning health: combined effects of warming and air quality, impacts on the production of pollens and allergies, impacts on infectious diseases. All these issues lead to a need for approaches integrating different disciplines. Furthermore, climate change impacts many ecosystems which, in turn, affect its evolution.

Our experience shows that interdisciplinarity supposes, in order to take shape, the conjunction between programming choices, supporting this kind of approach, and autonomy given to experimenting with interdisciplinary practices. The interdisciplinary approach does not put itself in place and requires a collective reflection on the objectives and practices. Many tools exist to support this process, in particular to mature interdisciplinarity. This incubation period allows the various disciplines to learn to know each other and to build a common conceptual and methodological basis.