Unpacking the use of national climate scenarios in Switzerland

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By whom are national climate scenarios taken up, and which products are used? Despite numerous (national) climate scenarios being published by countries across the globe (e.g., United Kingdom, Netherlands), studies of their uptake and application remain low. Analysing a survey and group interviews on the ways the Swiss climate scenarios CH2011 have been used by the Swiss adaptation community, we encoded the emerging differences in a new typology of observers, sailors, divers. Taking an iceberg as a metaphor for climate scenarios, most respondents were sailors, accessing only key findings above the waterline (i.e. information in summary brochures). However, the vast majority of climate scenario data remains below the surface (i.e. downscaled climate model data), accessible only to the quarter of respondents labelled divers. Lastly, another quarter are observers, interested in the top of the iceberg from afar (i.e. summary brochures), but without applying the climate information for any particular purpose. By describing three different ways of using climate scenarios, we aim to clarify the often vague notion of 'user' circulating prominently in discussions around climate services and knowledge co-production (cf. Lemos et al. 2012). In addition, our results question the adequacy of simplifying climate scenario use by a user's easily observable characteristics – such as being a researcher, by sector or by numeracy. Our findings thus call for more nuanced and informed discussions of how users are imagined, portrayed and characterised in future research projects aiming – and possibly being required – to be 'user oriented' and their products 'usable'.