

Defining and assessing the risk of a territory being harmed by climate change

Many definitions of vulnerability¹ and adaptation² do not clearly distinguish between inherent and self-inflicted realities, as is the case with the following IPCC definition “The degree to which a system is susceptible to, or unable to cope with, adverse effects of climate change, including climate variability and extremes. Vulnerability is a function of the character, magnitude, and rate of climate variation to which a system is exposed, its sensitivity, and its adaptive capacity.” In this case, there is no distinction between inherent (or natural) or man-made adaptation.

This paper argues that, in order to assess the risk of being harmed by climate change, it would be useful methodologically to (i) confine the concept of vulnerability to natural factors and (ii) the concept of adaptation (or resilience) to man-made or policy induced factors. In addition this distinction would render the discussion more useful for policy.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Section 2 distinguishes between inherent and policy-induced realities, and presents four scenarios relating to these realities. Section 3 presents an attempt to measure the risk of being harmed by climate change on the basis of the distinction discussed in the previous section. Section 4 concludes the paper with a summary of the methodological advantages relating to the approach proposed in the study.

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¹ For a discussion on the concept of vulnerability to climate change see Fussel (2005).

² For a discussion on the concept of adaptation see Levina and Tirpak (2006).