

Are we all on the same boat? The challenge of adaptation facing Portuguese coastal communities: Risk perception, trust-building and genuine participation

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A b s t r a c t

The Portuguese coast is experiencing severe erosion and loss of beachfront, processes which are expected to become worse with climate change impacts. These additional alterations are beginning to show at a time when financing for conventional coastal protection is no longer guaranteed at scales of investment which are likely to be required if future coastlines are to be maintained. This paper looks at how residents and key stakeholders of three coastal communities in Portugal perceive such possible changes, how far they judge and trust current coastal management, and how they perceive their current participation and foresee future forms of involvement on adaptive coastal change. The evidence from these surveys and interviews suggests that there is a strong commitment in each location to maintaining current levels of coastal protection, and to preserving the integrity of local societies and economies, even though there is also recognition that adaptation in some form will eventually be required. However, our research reveals that there is not yet sufficient trust between coastal stakeholders, especially towards public institutions and policies, for any degree of progressive coastal adaptation to take place. Building trust in creative learning processes of progressive adaptation could lead to improved science and participation along with a meaningful dialogue over cooperative coastal planning and financing. The research undertaken for this paper lays the groundwork for such a process of trust-building to begin.