Adapting the Future

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Table of contents

Abstract

Climate adaptation shapes up to be the defining paradigm of the 21th century. This thesis seeks to understand the role climate adaptation plays today, and how it will shape the future. It is a common assumption that climate adaptation is "green", a claim I will investigate through a mixed-methods approach.

First, it analyzes data from the OECD's Creditor Reporting System to see how North-South finance flows have changed over the last ten years. It finds that while the amount of aid tagged as climate adaptation is rising, it is not across the board. This leads to a structural shift in aid, where a larger part of aid is out in construction, transport and energy.

Second, it analyzes the National Adaptation Plans subitted to the UNFCCC, through the Causal Layered Analysis framework. It finds that, despite the planned interventions amount to a total rewiring of the economy on all levels, they fail to envision a different future. The interventions, rather, seem to believe there is no alternative to the destructive system that have caused climate change in the first place.

Lastly, the thesis suggests more research into new ways of understanding climate adaptation, and highlights promising work by authors in the fields of futurology, design and development. Based on these different conceptualizations, I construct three different scenarios for the future of climate adaptation.

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Part I

Introduction

1 Motivation and context - Climate change is the future

In January of 2025, as I am starting the process of writing this thesis, the people Los Angeles is feeling the extreme effects of a changing climate. As of today, 24 persons have died from the fires, and billions upon billions of assets have gone up in smoke. Irreplaceble art and music, stored in the homes of the elites that lived in Hollywood, are likely lost for ever.

As this thesis progresses, I will find more examples of climate disasters to write in this section.

1.1 Human Security and climate security

Climate change is dangerous, unfair and already happening. Environmental security is a key pillar in the Human Security approach. Climate change risks to harm it.

Something about the shifting geopolitics meaning that the green transition is also somehow becoming securitized, and that the global polity is more concerned with the security-frame of international relations. Global south adaptation becoming a central part of the climate discourse, and as I will expand on in later in this thesis, it is unclear what it actually entails.

Climate security is a multi-level issue. Droughts, floods and other extremes caused by climate change could impact the livelihoods of many, and possible threaten peace and security in society at large.

Security is also concerned with anticipating and avoiding risk. This means looking into the future.

Climate adaptation is special because of its orientation to the future. It is a process of adaptation to risks of change. It is a reconstruction of the world to adapt to dangers that we do not know the full extent of. Most theory today assumes that climate adaptation can, and will come, as a win-win for people, climate and

Climate

Understanding climate adaptation

In Scandinavia, climate security (klimasikring) and climate adaptation (klimatilpasning) is used interchangebly. I will use climate adaptation thorughout the rest of the thesis, because this is the language of the UNFCCC.

1.2 International climate change governance

While mitigating climate change perhaps is most important, adapting (and shielding) people, industries and nations from the risks of climate change is growing in prominence. At the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) to the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Dubai, an agreement was signed that the parties should make $1300 billon available, every year, for climate adaptation[1].

Governments and civil society organizations around the world welcomed this, as the poorest in the world are the most vulnerable to climate change. Climate adaptation is therefore possibly becoming the new interface for financial aid between the Global North and the Global South. Most of the discourse around climate adaptation assumes many win-win scenarios[2].

The UNFCCC has three pillars: Mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage (Hall and Persson 2018).

The mitigation pillar has been a part of the UNFCCC since the Kyoto protocolls in [way back then], and is perhaps the most important part of the Convention. Since the Paris agreement (COP21) in 2015, all parties to the Convention has to submit Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) every five years.

Measures within the mitigation pillar span the whole economy, and is a process internal to every country, with the exeption of different carbon trading regimes, such as UN REDD+ or the European carbon trading system (ECTS).

Climate adapation is measures aimed at limiting the damage caused by unmitigated climate change. It is, in a sense, the spillovereffect from unsuccessful

Climate adaptation is at its simplest all infrastructure and change that is aimed at reducing the impacts of climate change (Ensor and Berger 2009). Some expand this understanding to include exploiting the opportunities climate change can bring with it (Vanhala and Hestbaek 2016). This definition makes it possible to frame most infrastructure development as climate adaptation measures (Toussaint 2021). Climate adaptation is largely financed by the state where the infrastructure is built, although a larger degree of ODA is spent on climate adaptation related infrastructure (Dewan 2022).

Loss and damage is the newest pillar, and its distinction from climate adaptation is muddied. When it was first brought it up, it was intended as a formalized and legalized form of climate compensation. It was supposed to pay for losses and damages that occurred beyond the limits of adaptation (Janzen et al. 2021). This is not the version adopted by the UNFCCC. Loss and damage is to be financed through the same channels as adaptation, and will be mainstreamed into development assistance (Scoville-Simonds, Jamali, and Hufty 2020).

[1] The language of the agreement states: blablabla

[2] See all these many sources that claim that climate adaptation could also be

The logic of the UNFCCC then becomes: All countries must cut their emissions. The impacts of unmitigated climate change must be adapted and what is beyond adaptation must be paid for as damages.

The interest in the different

`A graph that shows how interest in climate adaptation/security has exploded, and how it compa`

While the distinctions I present here are *true*, they are not popularly adapted, and as I will highligh in Section 3.1.1, many approaches to climate change seek to impact (or subvert) all pillars simultainously.

Climate change finance is a billion-dollar industry, and scholars claim climate adaptation is increasingly being funded with funds from other policy areas (Scoville-Simonds, Jamali, and Hufty 2020). The money is funneled into a growing amount of international funds dedicated to climate adaptation, and existing projects are being recast as adaptation projects (Dewan 2022; Paprocki 2018).

Through my time as a political activist and chair of a non-profit youth organization, I have felt the shift in priorities from international-, regional- and local funders, all shaping what activities we chose to do.

As a part of my bachelor thesis, I travelled to Uganda and participated in the activities of the two largest climate activist organizations there, Fridays for Future Uganda (FFFUg) and the Rise Up Movement. I found that, through strategic engagement with the development discourse, a lot of Twitter-accounts with slightly different messages (ex. Climate and Christianity, Climate and gender etc.), they managed land projects, mostly planting trees or picking up garbage, and pay themselves and their contacts a wage.

And finally, this became very clear after moving to Denmark to study, where most, if not all, funding for political work, is project based and given through fonde and legater.

This shift, and the shift to project work is well described in the literature, and something I will expand on below. Thus, the goal of this project is to better understand this shift on the global level, and attempt to chart out where climate adaptation is today, and how it will shape the future.

1.3 Climate adaptation as a new paradigm

The Anthropology of Development, as the critical analysis of development actors and their projects has a long history. Thinkers like Ferguson (1994) and his analysis of the *Anti-politics*

machine in Lesotho and Escobar (1995) and the discourse of underdevelopment in Latin America have highlighted and spurred research into why development seems to always miss targets and fail in predictable ways.

Scholars have recently begun the work of deconstructing the climate adaptation discourse. Paprocki (2018) describes it as an *Adaptation regime* based on her field work in Bangladesh. She argues that some countries are constructed as climate vulnerable and therefore in need of climate adaptation and that this imaginary is closely related to other historical processes of colonialism. All societal issues are reduced to be climate related, and unavoidable (Hulme 2011). This dystopian imaginary builds the groundwork for extensive experimentation, since the dystopian outlook eliminates the possible downsides. This, she argues, leads to dispossession as land is taken for shrimp aquaculture and migration to the cities is promoted. The poor and vulnerable that were supposed to be helped, simply are not (Paprocki 2018).

Dewan (2022) further develops this, highlighting the building of dams and polders as flood protection. She argues the polders built as a climate adaptation measure, are the same as the old for flood protection, and are successful at acquiring funding. Climate adaptation was *the spice* that made their applications for funding work. The only issue was that the polders did not work. By blocking the seasonal flooding and draining, the rivers became silted and needed dredging, furthering the risk of floods (Dewan 2022).

This will all sort under the *mitigation* pillar of the UNFCCC, the first of three. All actions taken to avoid global warming and the following climate change, falls into this category. That also includes taxes on emissions and renewable power, as well as many other more or less effective measures.

The second pillar, adopted in [say, 2015] is climate *adaptation*. It involves all measures taken to avoid the causes of global warming. Building sea walls to keep storm surges out of urban areas, shielding argiculture from exsessive rain

The third of the UNFCCC, adpoted in [say, 2022] is *loss and damage*, conserning all damages from global warming that are beyond adaptation. This pillar is highly disputed, as it was originally proposed as a way of bringing a judicial understanding of climate justice into play, where countries could sue other countries for the losses and damages their emissions had caused. While this is not the understanding adapted by the UNFCCC, where it is just seen as another form of climate adaptation.

2 Scope and research questions

his thesis seeks to understand climate adaptation funding flows, on a global scale. Since this funding, and its discourse, is anchored in the UNFCCC[1], it is a natural focal point for the study. The declarations made at the end of every Climate Summit are the outcome of intense negotiations at the summit, and their contents become a part national political debates all around the world.

The UNFCCC is also the stage where climate-related are launched, and a meeting place for activists, lobbyists, decision-makers and experts. The National Adaptation plans are a part of this, where a World Bank supported project has

What is climate adaptation?

- How has climate adaptation evolved at the UNFCCC?
- What is the impact of cllimate adaptation on are North-South finance flows?
- What are the most common climate adaptation interventions? What do they replace?

I intend to answer these question by analyzing flows in the OECD DAC CRS dataset [2]. The first question would be answered by modelling the relationship between the climate adaptation marker and the funding flows. The second question will be answered in the same dataset, looking at the relationship between the OECD sectors and the marker. The last one will look at the relationship between development funders[3] and the climate adaptation marker.

How will climate adaptation shape the future?

- What futures do climate adaptation projects have? What are their implications?
- How are climate adaptation interventions justified? Who decides?
- How could climate adaptation be reimagined? What are the alternatives?

I intend to answer these questions by analyzing the English language National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) submitted at the UNFCCC. The analysis will be layered and aim to deconstruct the visions of the future expressed in the texts. I identify the key methphors underpinning the adaptation discourse.

[1] There is an argument to be made that the Norwegian economy is suppresed by the phenomenon known as "Dutch Disease", where one very large export sector hampers growth in all the others. See Aune, Cappelen, and Mæland (2020) for a more detailed explaination

[2] While it excludes fossil fuels from the future, it does not conceptually choose between technologies

[3] See all these many sources that claim that climate adaptation could also be

Lastly, based on these methaphors, I construct three scenarios for the future of climate adaptation. One where the trends continues as I found the first research question, one where *protection* is prioritized and one where *capacity* is prioritized.

Part II

Research design

3 Theory

3.1 Theoretical approaches to climate adaptation

3.1.1 Synergy approaches

[Definitions of vulnarability and resilience to climate change]

[Highlight the 100% overlap between vulnerability and poverty]

3.1.2 Vulnerability approaches

3.2 Layered visions of the future

3.2.1 The adaptation regime and defuturing

4 Methods

Part III

Analysis

5 Findings

6 Discussion

7 Conclusion

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