

# Re-thinking how climate services are talked about

**Climate service development faces an interesting paradox: User orientation is a fundamental aspect of climate services, yet the concept of climate services did not originate from the users and remains unclear for them.**

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Climate service has become an increasingly hot topic among European Union research and innovation policymakers and some academic circles. These services can be defined simply as providing climate information, data or products to someone. For example, these services can vary from forecasts to economic analyses (EU, 2015). Climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction are perhaps the most typical contexts of climate services along with different uses of seasonal forecasts, and as a process, climate service development and delivery is focused on user needs.

The idea of climate services is not new, it emerged already in 1970's (Harjanne 2017) but remained somewhat marginal until the introduction of the Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS) by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in 2011 (WMO, 2011). Recently, European Union has become a major promoter of climate services. Guided largely by the European Research and Innovation Roadmap for Climate Services (EU, 2015), the union has funded over 30 projects concerning climate services research, innovation and development. Besides developing services, themselves, the project aims have included support in creating functional climate services markets. EU-MACS and MARCO are examples of such projects.

The Finnish Meteorological Institute (FMI) has been an active partner in cli-



**FIG 1: Urban planning themed climate services workshop in the EU-MACS project.**

mate service research, development and innovation projects. In this work we have observed a major challenge regarding the engagement of users and potential users. It seems that many climate services are not a sufficiently attractive concept for most people outside the field. Sometimes the reason can be low prioritization of climate issues or low interest towards climate information in general, but there seems to be more to it. It may be that the idea of climate services does not address the stakeholders' views well enough. This is also indicated by the observation that arranging research interviews has been easier than getting workshop or survey participants, but often it has turned out in the beginning of the interview that the interviewee has a faint if any understanding on what the climate services are.

This means we have a paradox in our hands. User orientation is a fundamental aspect of climate services, yet

climate services are not a user-oriented concept. Based on our experiences, it seems that in developing climate services it is worthwhile to take a step back and listen, with the aim to understand how climate risks are framed and conceptualized in different fields and industries, instead of offering uncustomized solutions. A prime example is the formation of Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TFCD) that has presented a new, holistic approach on climate risk management in the finance sector (TFCD, 2017). In general, ethnographic methods could offer a fruitful path in future research work.

In the end, it is important to remember, that climate services are means for certain ends, not ends in themselves.

For more information about recent studies on climate services, see: EU-MACS (EUropean MARKET for Climate Services) and MARCO (Market research for a Climate Services Observatory).

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