

Adaptation to Climate Change

Shared Understandings

Here are some shared understandings of ‘adaptation to climate change’ curated through our Living Glossary workshops with our community of practice. These can be used as starting points in your work and projects.

Adaptation to Climate Change is:

- 1) The physical and/or mental changes that mitigate the impacts of climate change on human society and the natural world. These changes must be made at all levels of society
- 2) Accepting the need to change and to respond proactively, innovatively and flexibly to benefit people, place, and the environment, in a socially just and equitable way
- 3) Creating resilience in human and natural systems, an urgent non-negotiable
- 4) Any response that involves a change of any kind to the climate emergency
- 5) Learning to live with the climate emergency – being ready and having plans whilst being willing to change expectations. Agility in thinking about what we could change, being able to bounce back. Could leave people behind - all will need the capacity and capability to do this
- 6) Making hard (or easy) changes to how we live so we can be safe and healthy when the ‘weather’ is different – proactive not reactive

Further Reading

- Aguiar, F.C., Bentz, J., Silva, J.M., Fonseca, A.L., Swart, R., Santos, F.D. & Penha-Lopes, G. (2018) Adaptation to climate change at local level in Europe: An overview. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 86, 38-63.
- Cabana, D., Rölfer, L., Evadzi, P. & Celliers, L. (2023) Enabling climate change adaptation in coastal systems: A systematic literature review. *Earth's Future*, 11(8), 1-18.
- Moser, S.C. (2014) Communicating adaptation to climate change: the art and science of public engagement when climate change comes home. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 5(3), 337-358.
- Orlove, B. (2022) The concept of adaptation. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 47(1), 535-581.
- Owen, G. (2020) What makes climate change adaptation effective? A systematic review of the literature. *Global Environmental Change*, 62, 1-13.

Etymology

Adaptation is derived from multiple origins, as it is partly borrowed from **French** and partly from **Latin**. Its post-classical Latin etymon is *adaptatio*, denoting application, or the action of accommodating one thing to another. Its French etymon adaptation denotes the action of adapting or applying, application, adaptedness, or the action of adjusting.

The term was first recorded in English in the 16th century, defining transitive circumstances where a deliberate coming together of two objects effects a change in their nature. Later nuances emerged, with adaptation coming to signify not only the act of adjustment but also the process of becoming accustomed to new conditions. From the mid-20th century onward, its root word 'adapt' also began appearing in conditional constructions - for example, 'If we don't adapt, X will happen' (Source: Oxford English Dictionary).

Climate is also derived from multiple origins, again partly borrowed from **French** (*climat*) and partly from **Latin** (*clima*). In both cases it relates to regions of the earth defined relative to external factors (e.g. celestial bodies, prevailing weather patterns, latitude) and this meaning was carried into the earliest recorded English usages of the word too. Meanwhile, change is borrowed from the **French** *change*, denoting reciprocal exchange - in military contexts, such as the exchange of prisoners, and in financial environments i.e. the act of, or a place to exchange goods or money. It was also employed in hunting terminology, in cases where hounds mistakenly followed the wrong scent – this later evolved into a broader sense of inconsistency or fickleness (Source: Oxford English Dictionary).

The first use of the term 'climate change' in English is recorded as occurring in the mid-19th century, although its frequency of use saw a substantial rise in the latter half of the 20th century, and a further significant jump in the 21st century, particularly in the late 2010s and early 2020s (Source: Oxford English Dictionary).