

The Ethics of Adaptation to Rising Sea Levels – a Literature Review

Adaptation to sea level rise will be necessary for the large share of the world's population who live by the coast. Many ethical issues are involved in how people and society adapt to changing sea levels, but a review of these issues has lacked until now. This paper presents the results of a systematic review of ethical-related issues in the literature of adaptation to climate change in general and sea level rise in particular. Three main categories of ethical issues are identified: 1) conflicts between different fundamental values, 2) procedural and distributional justice, 3) problems of basing decisions on limited knowledge of future consequences. The findings indicate that while these questions are ever-present, their impact on decision-making is limited and this increases the risk of maladaptation. Mapping the ethical landscape and providing an overview can bring a new perspective to scientific studies but also to policy related to sea level rise. Understanding the ethical issues is of crucial importance when studying adaptation to rising sea levels and when turning theory into practice.