

What is the ExposUM Doctoral Nexus?

The Doctoral Nexus proposed by the [ExposUM Institute](#) are networks of 3 to 4 doctoral students from different disciplines and affiliated to at least two different research units.

Compared with a traditional thesis, taking part in a Doctoral Nexus will foster the ability to work in a team and to design projects in a transdisciplinary way, while deepening your own field of expertise.

A specific teaching programme will be offered and the doctoral students concerned will also have the opportunity to organise a seminar within the Nexus network.

Theses are funded from the outset for 4 years, including the doctoral student's salary and an environmental allowance.



Individual sheet: Thesis No. 4

Thesis title: Modalities of exposure to climate risks, eco-anxiety and social cohesion

Planned start date of thesis: 01/10/25

Thesis supervisor #1: REY-VALETTE Hélène, UMR CEE-M, EDEG, HDR: Yes, Proposed supervision rate: 50%. Current supervision rate: 0

Thesis supervisor #2: BAZART Cécile, UMR CEE-M, EDEG, HDR: No, Supervision rate proposed: 50%. Current supervision rate: 0

Thesis subject

Context :

Eco-anxiety is both an individual and a social phenomenon. When it develops and impacts on mental health, it is capable of altering individual decisions (having children) as well as social behaviour (resentment towards those who 'don't do it', guilt for 'not doing it' compared to others) and thus social cohesion. It can take the form of isolation or various forms of more or less radical commitment that change the structure and functioning of society by segmenting it. We are following on from the theses previously described by working on the determinants of eco-anxiety (Pihkala, 2020), the emotions it arouses and the impact it can have on individuals' decisions and actions (Helm 2018; Ojala, 2021).

Objective:

This thesis looks at the consequences of exposure to environmental risks, via the communication that accompanies public policies, on the level of eco-anxiety and well-being. The latter will be considered from the individual (construction of a life project) and social (involvement in the life and development of society) points of view.

This is about :

- to broaden the population studied, with a quantitative online survey on a representative sample of the French population (minimum of 1000 participants), in order to question the determinants of perceived and measured eco-anxiety. We are contributing here to previous research by questioning the responsibility for direct and indirect exposure to environmental risks through the communication that accompanies public policies (Hickman, 2021; Pihkala, 2022), whether it comes from public authorities, the media or experts.

These communications are sometimes carried out in the heat of the moment and focus directly on recent extreme weather events (Xynthia) and their economic consequences (destruction, human lives).

Beyond these circumstances, we speak of cold communication. This type of communication involves more diversity in the message and medium (information, persuasion, humour, commitment) and in the message itself, with a focus on explaining indirect consequences (health, invasive species, etc.), which is known as indirect exposure.

We will add to the explorations an analysis of specific climatic risks, grouped together under the heading of climate change-related risks, in order to identify those that cause the highest-level anxiety, while questioning the duration of the anxiety-provoking effects of these different events and the ways in which they impact (2). Here we can draw on laboratory experiments to supplement the findings of the survey.

- (2) Secondly, we will try to estimate the potential consequences of eco-anxiety, bearing in mind that inclusiveness and social cohesion are decisive for the implementation of transition policies (Collof et al., 2023). This interaction takes place both at the individual level, by encouraging the autonomy of individuals, and in terms of governance, by structuring collective arrangements and networks. We believe that impairment of good mental health will result in impairment of individual and social capabilities.

- In the life cycle, because the ability to build one's life can be impacted if eco-anxiety undermines mental health and leads, for example, to depression, or if it weakens self-esteem and leads to a lowering of expectations (Sen, 2012). It is possible to test the impact of communication on self-esteem, on an index of life satisfaction or to question the emotions felt in the short term.

Methodology :

We will study a larger sample of the population (representative of the French population, n=1000) than the two specific sub-populations considered in the other two theses (n=500 for the exploratory survey in thesis n°1 with a non-representative sample, and a young and student sample for thesis n°3), which will enable us to confirm the previous results (thesis n°1) and to situate them in relation to the general population (thesis n°3). In order to identify key determinants of the degree of eco-anxiety, this first survey will include additional variables (compared with the studies in the other theses) on personality and individual reactions (e.g. In order to identify the key determinants of the degree of eco-anxiety, this first survey will include additional variables (compared with the studies in the other theses) on personality and individual reactions (e.g. altruistic values, values of connection with nature, feelings of isolation), exploratory questions on the ways in which people are aware of climate risks, and variables such as gender and the size of the municipality of residence in order to compare the role of the environment in urban and rural areas on both perceptions and the social structures that determine social cohesion.

Depending on the results obtained, dedicated sub-surveys will be carried out to 1) characterise the impact of exposure methods: methods of indirect knowledge of climate risks and methods of communication about direct exposure experienced (heatwaves) and 2) find out the consequences of the perception of climate risks on the life course. In the latter case, different samples of different ages will be studied. Laboratory experiments will also be set up (and dedicated funding requested) in order to test the determinants identified.

Feasibility :

The data will be collected using the LimeSurvey platform, which is already available to the UM's teacher-researchers, with the support of the CEEM's specialist technical engineers. The analysis of the surveys may be furthered by the construction of laboratory experiments within the CEE-M or a quasi-experimental adaptation of the questionnaires (DCE). The CEE-M has the expertise and platforms required for this type of methodology and the PhD student will therefore be able to use them with technical and methodological assistance.

Expected spin-offs:

The results will enable us to broaden our knowledge of the sources of eco-anxiety and to go beyond an understanding of emotional reactions to environmental stresses to analyse the consequences for individuals of their decisions and potential changes in society. In this way, we will be able to question and discuss the ways in which public information and transition policies can be adapted.

References

- 1 Colloff M.J., Gorddard R., Abel N., Locatelli B., Wyborn C., Butler J.R.A., Lavorel S., van Kerkhoff L., S., Múnera-Rold'an C., Bruley E., Fedele G., Wise R.M., Dunlop M., 2023. Adapting transformation and transforming adaptation to climate change using a pathways approach, Environmental Science and Policy 124, 163-174.
2. Helm, S.V., Pollitt, A., Barnett, M.A., Curran, M.A., Craig, Z.R. (2018). Differentiating concern in the context of psychological adaption to climate change. Global environmental change. 48, pp.158-167.
- 3 Hickman C, Marks E, Pihkala P, et al (2021). Climate anxiety in children and young people and their about government responses to climate change: a global survey. Lancet Planetary Health;5(12):e863-e873
- 4 Murunga, M. (2022); Public engagement for social transformation: Informing or empowering? Environmental science and policy, 132, pp.237-246
- 5 Ojala, M, Cunsolo, A., Ogunbode, C.A., Middleton, J. (2021). Anxiety, worry and grief in a time of environmental and climate crisis: A narrative review. Annual Review of environment and resources, 46, pp. 35-58.
- 6 Parmentier, M. L. et al (2024). The influence of environmental crisis perception and trait anxiety on the level of eco-worry and climate anxiety. Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 101, 102799.
7. Pihkala, P., (2020), "Anxiety and the ecological crisis: An analysis of Eco-anxiety and climate anxiety", Sustainability, 12, 7836.
8. Sen, A., (2012). The Idea of Justice, Champ Coll. Essais, Paris, 558 p.

How to apply

The application must include the following elements:

- A CV
- A covering letter
- A copy of the diploma required for registration
- Specific information requested by the EDEG doctoral school (Ecole doctorale économie gestion), <https://edeg.umontpellier.fr/>

Please send your application to helene.rey-valette@umontpellier.fr and cecile.bazart@umontpellier.fr , with a copy to the project leader Marie-Laure.Parmentier@igf.cnrs.fr and exposum-aap@umontpellier.fr, **Before Monday 31 May, 14:00 CET**





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SCIENTIFIC APPEAL

Open to the world, the University of Montpellier contributes to the structuring of the European higher education area, and strengthens its international positioning and attractiveness, in close collaboration with its partners in the I-SITE Program of Excellence, through programs adapted to the major scientific challenges it faces.

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