

“Sustainable safety” for the Rhone plain in Switzerland?

A critique of enlargement as the alpha and omega of R3?

Alexis Metzger, René Véron

University of Lausanne

Correspondence to: Alexis.metzger@unil.ch

Abstract: In this paper, we focus on an expression highlighted in the “sustainable safety” project. First, we show how the discourses about flood prevention and safety are dominant. Then, we focus on the “sustainability” of the project and its three theoretical environmental, economic, social components. Then, we discuss this ambition of “sustainable safety” and hypothesise that this ambition is more or less synonymous with enlargement. Finally, we show why this kind of sustainable safety could not have actually been discussed in the Valais because of the federal law.

Keywords: floods, governance, sustainability, safety, Rhone River, Switzerland

1. Introduction

In order to protect the Rhone plain from floods, the Canton of Valais decided to carry out the so-called “Third Correction of the Rhone” (R3), with the support of the Federal Government and the adjacent Canton of Vaud, at an estimated cost of 3.2 billion Euros. According to the main official document explaining the project (PA-R3), 42 000 inhabitants in the Rhone Valley in Switzerland are currently at risk of being affected by a 100-year flood event. Damage could amount to as much as 9 billion Euros (PA-R3 p. IV). Massive works are to be conducted from 2016 to 2046 along the 160 km of the Rhone River - from Oberwald to Lake Geneva, particularly on the 100km stretch between the towns of Visp and the lake. Depending on the site, the enlargement of the riverbed, the lowering of the riverbed, or both, are planned; for some parts, no transformations are foreseen.

R3 displays a main goal interlinking safety and the environment, mentioning several times the expression “sustainable safety”, which leads to the main measure: “Enlargement is therefore the best option for ensuring sustainable safety”. Opposition to the project crystallised in the 2010s around a number of farmers and a political conservative party, the

UDC, against the enlargement. On average, space for the river is to be expanded 1.6 times, threatening the agricultural land close to the current banks. Nowadays, the maximum width of the Rhone between its 2 dikes is between 85 and 125 meters. In the future, it will be between 128 and 193 meters (PA-R3 p. 22). Although the referendum on their initiative concerning the financing of the project did not succeed, the discussions are still on-going. For example, an article in the most widely read daily newspaper in French-speaking Switzerland, *Le Temps*, headlined on 14 March 2021 that R3 is “taking on water”. Both the issues of soil pollution and the economic costs of the project are brought to the fore.

This presentation is based on two main datasets: 25 interviews with various stakeholders in the Valais and a discursive analysis of the main document entitled “safety for the future” (a part of which is entitled “sustainable safety”) produced by the Office cantonal de la construction du Rhone, promoting and in charge of the Third Correction. First, we emphasize how R3 foregrounds the safety argument. Then, we show how the environment and safety also are important in the project. Then, we discuss the expression “sustainable safety” which seems to combine these two ambitions. What is implied by “sustainable” in the context of the Third Correction is based on the enlargement, which is coherent with other projects in Europe: “Consensus has grown among water scientists that *sustainable* flood management requires “making space” for water by increasing retention capacity of floodplains” (Guerrin et al., 2014) . But we show finally how this kind of sustainability is partial and could not really have been discussed.

2. Safety

R3 aims to protect the Rhone plain from 100-year flooding. PA-R3 starts with the safety argument mentioning p. II "a serious safety deficit" and p.1 "a succession of recent disasters" with "clear signs of inadequate safety". But the intended protection is not absolute: "The construction of the Third Rhone Correction brings an enormous gain in safety with regard to flooding. However, absolute safety is neither technically nor financially feasible. Regardless of the level of protection, extreme events can overload the system and cause flooding. This residual risk is considered for very rare floods that are significantly higher than the Q100 target or the October 2000 flood" (PA-R3 p. 55). The majority of people interviewed recognizes that the safety component of the project is primordial, as one of them, promoting tourism in Valais,

states : “I feel pretty safe in what is in place now. One of R3's objectives is to find more safety for the population”. Two farmers also say: “The Third Correction is useful in terms of safety. No one disputes that”.

But safety in the first place is also a political argument, according to a former journalist at the *Nouvelliste*, the main local newspaper in Valais): “In accepting this project, the criterion of safety is crucial. Without the word safety, no one would want to hear about this Third Correction. This perception of the river as a threat, human beings have it... some amplify it... without the safety dimension there would have been no majority... in this sense safety is crucial. After that, opposing safety and the environment is bullshit”.

3. The three pillars of sustainability

In the PA-R3, the term “sustainable” is mentioned many times, such as p.18 “Protection against natural disasters is a fundamental condition for the sustainable development and prosperity of a society” or p. 19 “The general objective of the Third Rhone Correction was defined as follows: to contribute to the framework conditions for the development of the plain by a redevelopment of the Rhone that guarantees the functions of the river (safety, environment, socio-economic aspects) in a sustainable manner. This basic objective is specified by a series of specific objectives, tasks and principles, as follows”. But at no point in the RAP3 is the adjective sustainable precisely defined, even though it is a criticized and ambiguous concept whose date of appearance is not obvious (Theys, 2020).

A commonly accepted definition is that sustainability lies at the interface of three pillars, the environment (or ecology), the social and the economic. This issue about sustainability in flood management has been discussed in other countries and case studies. For example, in Scotland, “Sustainable flood management provides the maximum possible social and economic resilience against flooding, by protecting and working with the environment, in a way which is fair and affordable both now and in the future (resilience means: ability to recover quickly and easily. The Scottish Executive uses it to deliver the ‘four As’: Awareness + Avoidance + Alleviation + Assistance)” (Werritty, 2006).

For the environmental and ecological pillar, the ambitions of the project are important. The environmental deficit is noted at the beginning of the PA-R3 (p.II): “aquatic habitats are impoverished and do not allow, for example, the development of fish typical of an Alpine river

such as the Rhone. The natural habitats along the banks of the Rhone are also impoverished and fragmented. Apart from its functions as an aquatic biotope and riparian environment, the Rhône also has a role to play as a biological corridor". Moreover, PA-R3 begins the section devoted to ecology with "The Rhone should ensure several important natural functions: it should host aquatic life, that of the riverbanks, and ensure the networking of the environments as well as the self-purification of the water" (p. 11). Hence, "the 3rd Rhone Correction, by its necessity to resize the river to guarantee the safety of people and goods, will partly enable the Rhone to ensure its function as a biological corridor. Additional and occasional enlargements will make it possible to create richer relay zones" (PA-R3, p. 12). Enlargement is therefore at the heart of this first pillar.

The weight of the environmental pillar has been and still is much debated. We will come back to this below: the compromise that has been found does not fully satisfy environmental NGOs or people who do not put environmental protection at the heart of the future of the plain. Furthermore, the representation of what is the "environment" is subject to controversy. Several actors have their own conceptions, such as two farmers who speak of an "environmental disaster" in the event of an enlargement of the Rhone: "The Rhone plain is the most fertile land in terms of yields, forwardness, and variety of species. The 800 ha enlargement will destroy a resource that is not renewable. The water table which is contaminated... R3 is an energy and financial drain, a means of polluting the water table. With an environmental value of zero, we will increase the negative effects...". For them, "The environmental space of the Valaisans is what is around them, classified forests". So, it does not seem that the river, even if it were widened, and more broadly the plain, could count as "environmental" spaces.

Some difficulties in implementing environmental measures were pointed out by the stakeholders interviewed such as one employee of the hydroelectric sector: "The Third Rhone Correction brings positive aspects, leisure activities and also ecology... It's rather what is negative that is highlighted. I have the impression that when we set up natural zones, revitalization zones, they are seen as idealists, who don't bring much, we do it to improve the environment... Those who set up these measures are the ecologists... There is a history of good guys and bad guys which remains very ingrained".

The other pillars of sustainability are also concerned by R3. The economic components of the project are important, particularly because R3 aims to secure the building zones. Currently

located in the “red zone”, some areas will be able to be built once the safety measures have been carried out. This will allow businesses to expand or be created and ensure more jobs, as well as more accommodation for the inhabitants. Secondly, the loss of arable land because of the enlargement has economic implications. The project provides compensation to farmers and supports the idea of minimising the loss of agricultural jobs. Third concerning the river “directly” R3 could also have an ambition of creating hydroelectricity with new dams. As an interviewee mentions: “who knows if the Rhone will also be an economic lung. Why not gain energy through this river and give it importance?”. But PA-R3 is rather unclear : “Potential synergies between electricity production and the Third Rhone Correction have been identified and are being developed (...) such as the Massongex level, the Lavey+ project and the Rhôdix project” (p. 13).

Finally, the social aspect of the project, beyond protection against flooding, is without doubt the one that has emerged most recently, with the "Rhône nature park" development project. Although it is mentioned in the RAP3, it occupies a rather minor place compared to the safety and environmental issues (p.13 only with a sub-section on the socio-economic issues or p. 71 with a few sentences). The banks of the Rhone will become a pleasant area, an aspiration recognised by several actors. The whole question of social appropriation, or even heritage appropriation of the Rhone comes into play here. One employee of an environmental federal organism says that it is difficult to see the Rhone as a heritage site and specifies his desire to make the Rhone part of the identity of the Valais. This observations is shared by several actors interviewed, as another interviewee says, for example: "As a young person, as a teenager, the river seemed completely invisible to me. (...) When I came to the plain, the river was hidden behind rows of trees, between the cantonal road and the motorway, between large dykes, this river never seemed to me to be important, in the history of the canton, it was hardly mentioned. It was an insignificant river for me. And then it became the backbone of the Valais. It's really the thing that you don't perceive... now I've equipped myself with instruments that allow me to see that it's the Rhone, it structures a landscape, a territory, economic activities and different social representations".

Someone else, working in the cultural field, also expresses this change: "of Valaisan origin, I spent my childhood in Montana village, at an altitude of 1200 m, which is quite important when taking into account my relationship with the Rhone. In my youth, the river did not exist for me; it was very much linked to throwing oneself into the Rhone, to committing suicide".

Now he states that: "the whole Sion Olympics project is to reintegrate the Rhone, to socialize it, to reintegrate it into the life of the community. We're moving away from this image of the Rhone equals danger, equals a tamed monster, towards something more positive".

These actors share the idea that if the primary identity of the Valais is mountainous, this is changing with a plain which should constitute one of the strong images of the Valais. More precisely, an interviewee says that "in recent years, Valais tourism has always been oriented towards the mountains, with winter tourism. not towards the plain. But the tourist potential of the plain exists. We need to give back this Rhone to nature and make the plain more attractive".

These three pillars are intertwined in a complex way: "quantifying social needs, delivering 'fair outcomes for everyone' and balancing environmental gain with economic costs (possibly including foregone employment opportunities)" are objectives that are sometimes difficult to reconcile (Werritty, 2006, p.22). Here, renaturation goes hand in hand with social appropriation, as one member of a city council in the plain says: "You can ride your mountain bike on the river bank but it's not maintained. People like everything that is covered in vegetation. We have to renature things". However, the spatial balance of the three pillars is not yet clear, both in the PA-R3 and in the representations of the actors interviewed. This undoubtedly reflects a certain vagueness in the interaction between the development of the river and the territorial and socio-economic development of the Rhone plain. As Utz notices : "The main aim of the project is to secure the plain against the flooding of the Rhone, but it is also intended for local development, particularly in terms of agriculture, the economy and tourism" (Utz, 2017, p.176).

The space reserved for nature or recreational activities is still up for debate. As one representative of an environmental NGO fears: "What worries me more is that the developments are mainly for relaxation, the risk of having bathers, kayakers, everywhere, and that finally nature will not have much space left". Hence the remark and questioning of an artist working in Sion are relevant: "you have to choose what you are going to lose and what you are going to conserve. Keep neutral spaces, left to nature (...) there are a lot of forests and areas for agriculture but enough buffer zones, for nature, open spaces; what proportion are we leaving to nature not controlled by man?". One option being considered by the Rhone flood protection service, manager R3, would be to leave one bank more natural while another

could be given over to social appropriation and leisure activities (Marianne Gfeller, émission RTS 23/04/2021).

But how are safety and environmental issues mixed in the Third Correction? There might not only be tradeoffs but also synergies between ecological and safety objectives as the expression “sustainable safety” seems to imply.

4. Sustainable safety

While the primacy given to safety is recognised by a large majority of the actors interviewed, some also emphasise the links between safety and the environment. For example, one deputy to the Grand Council explicitly mentions the links between biodiversity and safety to find a political majority. One representative of an environmental NGO goes further: “There is safety, but I see it more as an aspect of promoting biodiversity, and then a more welcoming role for the population, that it is part of the places to which people go at weekends. It's an added value at all levels”. More precisely, speaking of the term ‘Correction’, he says that “we chose it for simplicity. In the past, it was really a question of corrections. But if we had talked about it like that, it would have been more difficult to defend it... The financing was voted by the population of Valais; when we talk about 'correction', it's a key argument, the safety aspect, which also affects a part of the population”.

To go back in the 2010s when the debate on agriculture became very important, the environmental organisations kept a low profile (especially the WWF, which had hired a Mr. Rhone with a “living Rhone” dynamic that it had initiated but which stopped). One biologist mentions “a focus on nature and agriculture, between on the one hand the NGOs who said the project is not ambitious enough and wanted 1100 h hectares today and 2000 hectares in the future. The NGOs said that 450 more were needed. On the other side, agriculture did everything to limit the project on the safety aspect...” However, it can be said that the environmental issue was rather sidelined, mainly because the environmental associations were somewhat discreet when the conflict with the farmers crystallised and the latter, supported by the UDC, which was expanding in Valais, made their voices heard. This led to the safety argument being put forward (to the detriment of the environmental argument): to counter the arguments of the farmers, who were fairly strongly supported by the population, the R3 promoters would have found it difficult to put forward the environmental argument

(Utz, 2017, p.189). Christophe Clivaz's intervention in the Grand Council on 9 December 2014 during the discussions about the decree creating a fund for the financing of the Third Rhone Correction project bears witness to this: "Yes, safety and economic issues are important. So are ecological aspects. The quality of the landscape, the environment and biodiversity should not be taboo".

So, what is sustainable with R3 is therefore what is above all sustainable for the safety of the territory against flooding. Does this vagueness about the concept of sustainable safety reflect an insufficient participatory process accompanying R3?

5. An open or closed participatory process for a sustainable safety?

5.1. The sustainability of the project in question

As Romain Felli (2015) shows, the concept of *sustainable development* appeared at the end of the Cold War, at the time of major reports. At that time, it was the given level of technical and social development that imposed limits on the environment, without the idea of neo-Malthusian global limits. With *sustainability*, it is more a question of means, efficiency and optimization: unlike sustainable development, which was based on a diagnosis, the concept of sustainability integrates neo-liberal standards.

The insistence on sustainability in the project can also be interpreted in this light: it reflects a form of "depoliticization" of the actions of governmental institutions, with their replacement by technical debates, which were indeed at the heart of the discussions before the referendum. A populist right-wing party (UDC), attempting to speak on behalf of agriculturalists who would be affected by a slightly expanded Rhone, demanded a referendum. Yet, the population of the canton agreed to the project in the ensuing vote. In fact, the debates focused on the (technical) variants of the enlargement and not really on social and political choices. If the referendum was about the financing of the Third Correction, it was the choice of a technical variant that the people voted on. The people of Valais were asked to approve or not the financing of R3, and thus to corroborate or not this vision of the plain's protection. In this sense, the people of the Valais did not approve of what R3 implies in terms of wider transformations of the territory, including environmental, social and economic modifications. While this vote serves as a kind of "guarantee" for R3, it did not cover

the whole of what the project implies. It was not a referendum discussing the equilibrium between safety and environment, or about what should be “sustainable” in Valais. Indeed, as observed in Scotland at the beginning of the 2000s, “All this represents a serious ‘greening’ of flood risk management strategies, but it does not fully engage with the need for long-term sustainability, which requires economic and social needs to be balanced alongside environmental gain” (Werritty, 2006).

Thus, it is as if the referendum process immediately focused on the enlargement variant, seen as the nexus of sustainability and sustainable safety, but without going on to question more fundamentally what was involved with the three pillars. While other issues, such as hydroelectric projects, have been discussed, it is clear that “the controversies surrounding the project mainly concerned the question of the development strategy between a widening and a deepening of the Rhone bed, finally leading to a mixed solution” (Utz, 2017, p.176). Thus, R3 can echo Felli's point that environmental ideologies based on sustainability are depoliticizing as they tend towards a future mapped out for society via a form of “technocracy” (see also Felli, 2016). Indeed, “from the publication of the PA-R3 in 2008, negotiations around the project focused mainly on the project's technical aspects, neglecting other issues and leading to a battle between one expert opinion and a second expert opinion” (Utz, 2017, p.199).

5.2. An insufficient participation?

Several interviewees expressed their disappointment with the participatory process. Regional steering committees (the COREPILs) have been created to provide discussion forums for a range of actors, for example from the world of agriculture, environmental protection, industry and tourism (Utz et al., 2017). Opinions differ widely.

According to a deputy of the Socialist party, it would have been necessary to speak more with inhabitants. One member of a city council in the plain particularly expresses himself with regard to the enlargement variant: “With the Third Correction, the good land was going to be plundered, there was no anticipation, no discussion with the locals, in Switzerland, we don't like what's there from a top-down point of view. Even in the COREPIL they were faced with a *fait accompli*. And now there are communes that will not see anything for 50 years... (...) In short, there were the COREPILs, but one step forward and two steps back”. Forms of

frustration on the part of some actors are noted by other interviewees as this testimony shows : “I'm quite happy to answer you frankly. There are people who are convinced that they have not been heard. The farmers. Since their variant is not taken into account, there is enormous frustration. They refuse the model, it's complicated. I hope that the engineers in the project will be able to be flexible, to hear what is going on, in the changes”.

In that sense, some people denounce the traditional top-down model of risk management “where the management problem is framed in terms of economic and technical rationality and the communication problem is viewed as informing or educating the public about risk as defined by the technical experts—of filling a knowledge gap” (Scolobig and Pelling, 2016) . Several researchers emphasise the need to use local experiences in flood management (Bell and Tobin, 2007; Borraz, 2007; Bottazzi et al., 2019; Wachinger et al., 2013). They could have been more integrated not only concerning the safety arbitrations but also the social, economic and environmental implications of the project.

It is true that during the project development phase, as some of the actors pointed out, a participatory process was developed in which associations (environmental, fishing) participated, as well as committees at regional level (Luyet et al., 2005; Utz et al., 2017a). Utz et Reynard conclude that the participatory process was exemplary and that the process is not considered instrumental: “The participatory processes thus constitute a platform for dialogue encouraging exchanges between the actors. The Rhone 3 project shows that participation should not be seen as an instrument to bring a project to fruition (instrumental perspective) but rather as a forum in which different points of view can be expressed and discussed (substantive perspective)” (Utz et al., 2017b). The authors refer here to Fiorino who speaks of a “an instrumental perspective where participation is implemented solely with a view to fostering public acceptance, as opposed to a substantive perspective where participation is intended to improve the project and is therefore a means to arrive at a better outcome” (Fiorino, 1990). At the end of the participatory process, the new development plan validated in 2012 by the Grand Councils of Valais and Vaud finally provides for nearly 20% less agricultural land than the initial project, by partially postponing the widening of the river onto forest areas and by including measures to lower the riverbed and strengthen the dykes you spelled this word as dikes previously (Péclet, 2012). But what could be discussed?

5.3. A project framed by federal law

We have seen that the term "sustainable safety" seems to be a rather rhetorical expression, as it is not really debated and defined, to mean enlargement. This choice is obviously at the heart of the project and the RAP3: under the question "how much to expand?" (p. 33) a first sub-section shows that the minimum safety enlargement is of the order of 1.5 to 1.6 times the current Rhone width. The second part is entitled "the enlargement necessary for sustainable safety »: enlargement should reach 1.9 times the current right-of-way to guarantee the "ecological functions of riparian biotopes".

In short, this part in the PA-R3 legitimises the choice of enlargement for safety **and** for ecology. While the whole project is presented as being above all safe, and largely understood as such by the interviewees, is it not the choice of widening the river that has been retained to implement a certain vision of the environment? Is the environment ultimately such a secondary issue in relation to safety, as we have understood so far? At least one can raise the hypothesis that, under cover of safety arguments concerning flooding, the variants to protect the plain (lowering of the riverbed, construction of several collinear dams...) were eliminated because they could not correspond to the environmental objective of the project, defined without consultation because previously legalized.

Indeed, PA-R3 states p. 31 "the choice of widening also makes it possible to achieve the environmental objectives required by the federal law on the development of watercourses by integrating nature-related aspects within the space necessary for safety". Alternatives were debated, studied, but the legal argument was repeatedly used to say that they could not be implemented. Indeed, "more generally, the recent revision of the legal framework governing interventions on watercourses, both at federal and cantonal level, integrates environmental aspects in addition to safety aspects. The Third Rhone Correction falls within the framework defined by these legal bases and by the directives that result from them" (p. 40 PA-R3). Moreover, "the alternative variants are unsustainable in terms of safety (they may even result in "a much greater danger to people"), they do not comply with the state of the art and are in "clear contradiction" with the law" (PA-R3 p. 18). This was concluded by the Zwahlen report in 2011 and Speerli in 2012 : "The concept of alternative projects of the municipalities in the Lower Valais consists of largely dispensing with the widening of the river bed and revitalisation measures in the context of the Third Rhone Correction, in favour of a general lowering of the river bed and a widening of the river in individual sections and between existing dykes, which

would have to be reinforced if need be. At the latest since the entry into force of the new provisions of the Water Protection Act (LEaux) and the Water Protection Ordinance (OEaux) of 1 January 2011 and the entry into force of the revision of Article 4 of the Watercourse Management Act, such an approach is generally no longer acceptable or adopted. It is in clear contradiction with Articles 36a and 38a Water Act (LEaux) and Articles 41a and 41d Water Ordinance (OEaux)".

Thus, how could the discussions have led to other variants to deal with the risk of flooding insofar as the general framework (widening, environmental measures) had been entrenched in the law for years? In the end, the contours of the project could hardly be defined *per se* by its managers because R3 is very strongly regulated by federal legislation (the LACE is very explicit on this point: the development of watercourses must pursue both safety and environmental objectives) and the federal administration, which finances the vast majority of it. According to the LACE, river development must indeed protect against floods, but at the same time protect (and revitalise) the ecological qualities of the river. This ecological function of rivers is an intrinsic function recognised by the LACE. The R3 project is in line with this new legislation adopted in 1991.

More in detail, the main purpose of the Federal Watercourse Development Act of 1991 is the protection of people and material assets against flooding. Article 4 lays down the requirements of the law: "Water, banks and flood protection structures must be maintained in such a way as to keep flood protection at a constant level, particularly with regard to flow capacity. When intervening in waters, their natural course must be respected as far as possible or, failing that, reconstructed. The water and the space reserved for water must be arranged in such a way that: a) they can accommodate a diversified fauna and flora; b) interactions between surface water and groundwater are maintained as far as possible; c) vegetation adapted to the plant can grow on the banks".

But what historical reference should we be aiming for in the case of the Rhone when it comes to a "reconstructed" natural route? The reference state (mid 19th century) is not representative of all the previous centuries and the first half of the 19th century produced a sedimentary crisis which tended to reinforce the braided character of the plain. The rivers have undergone different metamorphoses over time (Bravard, 1989). And what constitutes the "natural" route of the Rhone? Is it with this environmental concern that the choice of widening was in fact made, a choice that also allows us to tend towards a protection of the

plain against floods? As an interviewee says, "after all opposing safety and the environment is stupid". Actually, if the two objectives are not opposed to each other in R3, it is not so easy to say which of the two guided the current project the most.

Several laws have direct or indirect implications for the social and environmental pillars of the sustainability. What was not debated was the respective weight of the two legs of any watercourse development project under the LACE: protection against flooding and protection of the ecological functions of the watercourse. The economic aspect of the sustainability of the project was not clearly developed. The economic aspects of the river widening were the main focus of the discussions and commitments in the PA-R3.

6. Conclusion

R3 brings to the fore discourses about flood prevention and safety. This priority is recognized by the people interviewed. But the equilibrium between environmental and safety components has not been really debated. What is claimed to be sustainable in the RAP3, a key term that recurs many times, amounts to what is adequate for federal legislation, i.e. enlargement. Different federal laws have been previously established, compartmentalizing the "main lines" of R3. On condition that these laws, which imposed the widening and renaturation measures, were respected, the discussions could not lead to other variants. Thus, "sustainable safety" might be a cantonal, Valaisan variation of the federal law. Moreover, the various components of sustainability are not very thorough. The environmental aspect of the project is present, but it is secondary to the safety issues, which mainly concern the economic and social aspects. The other components of sustainability, which include social and economic aspects not only concerned with a safety objective, have not been discussed. They are taking on a new dimension, for example with the project to redevelop the banks of the Rhone and its surroundings, leading to mainly recreational and therefore social practices.

However, other options could have been studied that did not contradict the cantonal law, such as living with the floods (Scott et al., 2013; Vis and Klijn, 2001). But as the debates focus mainly on a socio-technical solution (the enlargement), we think that it has annihilated the possibility to think differently about floods. Indeed, living with floods is the case for many urban projects that deal with the risk of flooding (Balsells et al., 2015; Dreiseitl and Grau, 2009; Richard-Ferroudji et al., 2014; Sajaloli et al., 2011; Terrin and Marie, 2014; Watson and Adams,

2013) or projects in more rural places (Guerrin, 2015; Katz et al., 2020; Middleton, 2018). Hence, from a paradigm prioritizing protection against floods, as R3 brings to the forefront, this strategy “from the oak to the reed” (Rode, 2012) has other implications “by accepting the danger, we can imagine taking an interest in its other facets, and then integrating them into risk management through planning. Going beyond protection towards revealing the river” (Assouline, 2019).

Nevertheless, the acceptance of risk, which could also be “sustainable”, even of variable levels, is “off topic” with R3. In part 3 of PA-R3, entitled “solutions for a sustainable protection against the Rhone floods”, there is no mention of “living with floods”. Finally, as one engineer mentions: “Concerning the Rhone or natural hazards in general, risk awareness is higher than elsewhere. In past centuries, we had to protect ourselves from it, it was controlled. I don't think it's part of our identity. I'm not sure we've learned to live with floods in modern times. Before, no, Saillon, Conthey... People have just adapted to the situation, there are mosquitoes down there, I have my feet in the water, so I don't go there”.

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