

## Approaching a new War of the Worlds: Will Adaptation to Climate Change save us?

By Davide Colombo

*“There was a time of great uncertainty among humans. Less than a week after the announcement of a dried water reservoir on Mars, instead of forgetting, people began to fear the possibility of not being alone. Solitude can be a blessing or a curse, depending on factors such as timing, environment, and, most importantly, the context. This is why, when the speaker declared, “Ladies and gentlemen, we are not alone in the Solar System,” many struggled to see it as a good omen. At first, the news sparked widespread curiosity—from skeptics to enthusiasts—with sensational headlines like, “Are Martians Near?” or “Should We Consider Ourselves in Danger?” Radio presenters thrived on the buzz surrounding this discovery. Small, fire-like red and white explosions were seen through telescopes on Mars, near Terra Cimmeria, a scorched plain roughly 5,400 kilometers in diameter. Instead of panicking, scientists intensified their efforts to monitor the area, providing ample material for television and radio reporters eager for the next scoop. But what had seemed so remarkable just a week ago soon faded from public attention, as people became preoccupied with their daily routine, easily impressed but just as easily distracted when science intruded upon their lives. Then, the spaceship arrived. On*

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*a cloudy morning in Horsell Common, as people went about their usual business, a bright light followed by a burst of flame shattered the sleepy calm of the countryside. A massive metal cylinder, half-buried in the ground, presented an eerie sight to the civilians who quickly gathered around. The object gleamed from top to bottom, scratched from its impact with the dry soil, still hot from its friction with the atmosphere, and as silent as a tomb. As the dust began to settle, villagers emerged from their homes to see what had occurred. Compared to the usual, uneventful pace of life, this spectacle was unprecedented. Though afraid, people were already imagining the gossip it would spark at the next cattle fair. Then, in one terrifying moment, a group of slimy, alien figures slithered out from the cylinder. Farmers and animals, momentarily forgetting the crash and the metal monolith, were seized by an unfamiliar terror. The creatures did not walk but dragged themselves forward with writhing movements, their terrible eyes flashing in every direction, gasping for air with mouths full of sharp, needle-like teeth...*

*A personal interpretation from my read of H.G. Wells Masterpiece "The War of the Worlds"*



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I have always loved science fiction, especially in written form, but I also enjoy radio dramas and audiobooks from time to time. Imagine the excitement of a ten-year-old boy discovering a radio adaptation of H.G. Wells' masterpiece. For those who haven't had the pleasure of reading the novel, it's about an alien invasion from Mars to Earth. The entire novel is a little gem and, without exaggeration, the inspiration for countless authors writing about sci-fi after the nineteenth century. But that wasn't my first encounter with the Martians; I only read the book after hearing about Orson Welles' famous radio adaptation. Of all the adaptations, Orson Welles' version was the most famous, primarily due to its unique presentation. For more than half of the broadcast streamed via radio, the story was presented as a series of news bulletins, which reportedly caused panic among listeners who believed the events were real. Reactions like these, so understandable at the time, have always fascinated me. The audience's willingness to believe can sometimes completely change the outcome of a performance, driven by a whirlwind of unpredictable emotions.

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The memories of these emotions seemed to vanish, lost in the labyrinthine folds of my mind, leaving it without a clue about the power of conviction. However, these memories unexpectedly resurfaced when I came across an article about climate change in a popular social network. While the article itself accurately described the potential consequences of this phenomenon, I was deeply unsettled by the comments section beneath it. Several comments blatantly denied the existence of climate change, despite overwhelming scientific evidence. This disregard for science, hidden within seemingly innocuous comments, left me even more disturbed. I began to grapple with the unsettling realization that many individuals, especially those who didn't read the article, might remain completely unaware of the grave consequences of climate change could undermine understanding of the issue?



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The Orson Welles radio drama came to mind, showing how widespread misinformation can influence an audience when combined with insufficient time to properly explore the topic. Is there a genuine risk that misinformation about climate change? The European Union might be troubled by this thought. The European Union (EU) has embarked on five distinct missions, each aimed at safeguarding the environment, protecting biodiversity, and ensuring the well-being of all living species, including humans. These missions vary in their specific goals: some focus on soil protection, others focus on restoring the oceans, combating cancer, or building better, more sustainable cities. However, the mission on Adaptation to Climate Change stands apart—not in its spirit, but in its form. Ideologically, it can be seen as a cross-cutting mission with the potential to encompass all the others. For instance, restoring the oceans contributes to greater resilience against the severe and ongoing impacts of climate change, much like protecting soil from deforestation or fighting diseases like cancer. Promoting better health can lead to more conscious decisions regarding resource consumption and diet, which, in turn, fosters a more respectful and sustainable treatment of natural resources. The EU has already laid a strong



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foundation by achieving some goals in other missions. Consider the BLUE4ALL Project, which supports the Restore Our Oceans and Waters mission, or the Mareckie Centrum Edukacyjno-Rekreacyjne project in Marki, Poland, which focuses on green swamp roofs and public green spaces, contributing to the Build Smart and Green Cities mission. Achievements like these indirectly bolster climate adaptation and resilience efforts. Nevertheless, the scope of the Adaptation to Climate Change mission poses significant challenges for the EU and other regions, as its broad application requires extensive preparation. The EU must now focus on developing a comprehensive framework of laws and indicators to clearly define a timeline of goals that must be achieved before 2030. This is crucial to avoid wasting time and resources and to ensure progress on climate adaptation efforts. As previously mentioned, the EU mission focuses on supporting regions, cities, and local authorities in their efforts to build resilience against climate change. The EU strategy aims to better understand regional climate risks, how they are currently being addressed, and how they will be tackled in the future, equipping regions with the skills and habits needed to prepare for and cope with upcoming challenges.



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The 2030 target sets the ambitious aim of creating climate resilience in at least 150 European regions. Though ambitious, these goals contribute to the development of a framework of action based on the following principles:

- Make adaptation smarter, swifter, and more systemic: Data collection and risk assessments from families building homes, businesses in coastal regions, and farmers planning their crops are crucial to the adaptation process. To advance adaptation efforts, the EU aims to gather improved data through instruments like CLIMATE-ADAPT and other platforms. Responses must be quicker and more comprehensive to keep up with ever-changing environmental conditions. Given that climate change affects every aspect of society—from the economy to city planning—adaptation efforts must also be systemic.

The EU Commission will continue supporting the development and implementation of adaptation strategies across all levels of governance, focusing on three key priorities:



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integrating adaptation into the macro-fiscal policies of each region, increasing the use of nature-based solutions, and translating high-level decisions into local adaptation actions.

- Set up international actions on adaptation to climate change: The EU is a key partner in supporting global climate resilience, aligning its efforts with local and regional decisions through expanded international financing and global engagement to achieve more effective results.

The Adapt on Climate Change Mission aims to support at least 150 European regions and communities in becoming climate resilient by 2030. The Commission has adopted numerous strategies and established several organizations to address the broad scope of climate adaptation. Collaborative activities between institutions and regions have been identified as the best approach to counter the instability of climate change.





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The EU program includes actions in coordination with other Horizon Missions and collaborations such as the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, and the European Research Council. One notable result of the partnership between the EU and the European Environmental Agency is the European Climate Adaptation Platform, Climate-ADAPT. Aiming to help states meet the 2030 targets on climate and energy, it provides users with information on expected climate changes in Europe, the current and future vulnerability of regions and sectors, recent adaptation case studies, and potential adaptation options. The platform operates at various levels, including countries, transnational regions, and cities, offering extensive knowledge on research, innovative projects, tools, and best practices. Another key EU resource is the C3S Climate Data Store, developed by EU Space Organizations under the guidance of Copernicus EU, to share data and information.



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Some collaborative activities have already been established, such as the 2023 Joint Call between the Mission to Restore our Oceans and Waters and the Mission Soil Deal for Europe, both working together to enhance adaptation to climate change. The goal is to demonstrate that effective, inclusive, and integrated approaches to managing landscapes, soil, water, and vegetation—guided by a central authority and implemented at the regional level—yield positive results in enhancing resilience to climate change impacts on soils, wildlife, and biodiversity. The EU has set an ambitious target of creating at least 75 full-scale demonstrations that integrate directives from all three missions. Among other successful projects, I would like to highlight the ERRIN platform, a well-known Brussels-based network that gathers information from 120 regional organizations. Established in 2001, it supports its members in enhancing regional and local research and innovation capabilities, as well as further developing R&I ecosystems.



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Returning to the critical issue of information scarcity, ERRIN plays a vital role in promoting a strong culture of climate change adaptation. It provides a platform for knowledge exchange through 12 working groups and two task forces, which offer mentorship on policy issues and funding opportunities.

The EU Commission's mission to adapt to climate change is a race against time (2030 is no longer a decade away, but only five years from now). Given that current climate conditions and economic resources are constantly shifting, especially after major environmental events impact regions or states, the EU must act quickly to advance all its missions and establish a robust framework for climate resilience. Burying our heads in the sand in the face of the fact that we are running out of time is incredibly dangerous. Imagine an upside-down Orson Welles-style radio drama about climate change, where the audience is completely indifferent to the present disaster caused by floods or wildfires. We are in this exact position. Every day brings new spectacles of devastating environmental catastrophes that should awaken a shared sense of urgency. Yet, they fail to do so, largely due to our apathy towards environmental issues. As



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private citizens, we must become more informed about EU missions and the institutions proposing solutions to climate change. This can be achieved by reading editorials from sources like Easysustainability or CETRI-TIRES, or turning to more formal channels such as EU Commission reports. One thing is certain: before facing an invasion from Martians, we must resolve the environmental crisis. Otherwise, when the green travelers arrive, they will find a less hospitable place than Mars.

