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Titre (200 characters max)

To resist or to retreat? Is that really the question? When water infrastructures enable the coexistence of futures in Ault

Short abstract (300 characters)

Our proposal analyses the politicisation of water infrastructures in Ault, in particular the articulation of dikes, water drainage and soft hydraulics aimed at preventing coastal erosion. While not projecting the same future or the same values, their articulation enacts the ambivalent way of inhabiting the coastline in the present and future.

Long abstract (250 words)

Resisting? Coastal erosion has long affected life in the town of Ault, built on the alabaster cliffs of the Baie de Somme. Several streets have disappeared over the last two centuries. Erosion has been countered by defensive infrastructures (dikes, groins), contributing to a shared collective image of resistance to the sea. In 2013, the municipality's retreat strategy, questioning the maintenance of the defensive infrastructures and suggesting the relocation of 80 houses, led to a major mobilisation of the inhabitants.

Withdrawal? Today, the timing of the withdrawal is being post-poned without mentioning the sensitive issue of resettlement. The underground drainage system is being reconfigured to adapt to the projected fall of houses. This strategy does not generate conflict, while in the long term it facilitates the withdrawal.

Resisting and retreating? Far from replacing the desire to resist, this second strategy is combined with the desire to fight against the sea and the erosion caused by agricultural run-off. The politicisation of water infrastructure is thus achieved through a dual positioning of actors (residents and municipality), who consider different spatial and temporal scales (that of erosion and public action, and that of a human life). Local actors want to develop soft hydraulics on agricultural land in the hinterland to slow down run-off, but also maintain the so-called "83" dike, on the principle that other defensive structures are maintained in other areas of the coast. Through water infrastructures, two futures (Gandy, 2014) coexist in Ault: accepting erosion while trying to slow it down.