



Camille Andre

Coastal Risks Manager

Camille Andre, PhD, a French national currently living in Bordeaux in France. He was awarded a doctoral degree in the discipline of Geography from the Doctoral School of Marine and Coastal Sciences in the University of Brest in 2013. His doctoral thesis, entitled "Analysis of damages linked to coastal flooding and evaluation of the costs incurred by homes based on insurance data: perspectives provided by the storms Johanna (2008) and Xynthia (2010)", was completed under the supervision of Professors Catherine Meur-Ferec and Charlotte Vinchon.

Which company do you currently work for and what are your professional duties?

Today, I work in Bordeaux, within the Public Interest Group (GIP) Littoral en Nouvelle-Aquitaine. This public structure aims to support local authorities in planning and managing the coastal areas of the New-Aquitaine region. Within this structure, I am in charge of coastal risks management; it is therefore in direct continuity with the subject of my doctoral thesis. I product studies and I lead the discussions between all the partners members of the structure, from the level of the local authorities, to the regional authority and the State services. It's a job of animating the project, communicating knowledge and synthesising knowledge with all these stakeholders.

Has your job changed since you started working for the GIP?

Yes, my work has evolved. I joined the GIP in 2015, two years after my doctorate. At the beginning I was in charge of studies on a fixed-term contract, then two years later I took up a permanent situation. Since then, I have been a project manager.

What was your first job after the thesis?

I started with a postdoc contract, quite short, for 6 months. The originality of this position in Montpellier is that it was a contract in an economics laboratory. So, after a geography thesis, I did economics. But the subject of this mission was directly related to my thesis work. Then, for 18 months, I joined a first public structure for the management of public policies of the Mediterranean coast. It was then that I came to Bordeaux for the GIP Littoral.

Is your current job fulfilling?

Yes, today I am quite satisfied with my work. I have only been in this business for a few years, so for the moment everything is going well!

What aspects of your job are the most rewarding for you?

The aspect I find most rewarding is that it is a job where I learn a lot every day. The tasks are not repetitive. We have new projects all the time, new subjects. It's a job in which you renew yourself a lot. As it is a job with multiple tasks, many projects to be carried out at the same time, and new themes, it is never boring!

Would you be willing to share with us your professional victories and failures?

For successes, as soon as I finished my thesis, there was recognition of my results, recognition by my peers of my work. And very quickly, there were also concrete, operational applications in the public sphere, uses of my work in certain public policies by local authorities and by the Ministry of the Environment. It was really

very gratifying to see that a piece of research could find rapid applications in public policies in the field, in coastal risks management.

And today, in my work, I still find it gratifying to see that stakeholders in the field, mayors, elected representatives, adhere to what we say, adhere to the solutions that we propose, that they take them up, that they appropriate them. Seeing that things are moving forward, that research work is being taken into account by managers in their day-to-day lives, is something I am happy about.

A failure, a regret?

Perhaps it's seeing that things aren't moving forward as quickly as we would like, and seeing that there are obstacles in public institutions, resistance to change. No matter how much we know what we want, no matter how much we try to deploy all our conviction, things don't move forward as quickly as we would like. There are times when there is immobility and it is a bit frustrating. It's not a personal failure, but it's a failure in the sense that all the energy we deploy is not always enough to make things change.

Is your current job related to the doctoral studies you completed?

The link with my doctoral studies is very strong, as I have remained in the same field. A very precise theme, quite expert! All the knowledge I acquired during my doctorate, all my background, is still useful to me today. However, I have greatly diversified the questions I work on. So, it was a geography thesis, which was already quite interdisciplinary, and which had a lot of economics. But now I work on a daily basis on legal and regulatory issues, even though I have no legal initial training. I learned on the job. I also deal with financial issues, issues of communication with the public and partners. By staying on this topic, on which I have been an expert for a number of years, I have broadened the fields of intervention. Therefore, I have a very interdisciplinary activity.

"The doctorate is also a springboard for building a network outside the university"

Do you think that your doctoral studies enabled you to join the GIP?

Yes, even if I don't think that having a doctorate had been a determining factor in my recruitment... I am the only doctor in the GIP, there are nine of us, and the others do not have a doctorate. Everyone has nonetheless expertise in his own field. For my job, what was important was the fact that I was a specialist in the subject of risks management. The doctorate was a plus in the sense that it allowed me to build up a network, to have a very complete overview of the discipline, so it was undeniably a plus for my recruitment. But it was not a prerequisite for the job.

Do you think that after the doctorate there are broad possibilities for career development within and outside the institution?

Yes, I think so. My personal situation is that when I started my thesis, I knew that I wasn't necessarily aiming for a research and/or teaching position afterwards. My thesis project was the equivalent of a CIFRE (industrial) thesis with partnerships with the professional sphere and public authorities. I was therefore destined to pursue a career in the private sector or in the public sector, and that is what I succeeded in doing. I never had any doubts that it would be possible. The subject of my thesis was particularly suitable. As long as things are well prepared, well anticipated and the thesis is also a springboard for building a network outside the university. When you set aside three years to do this work, there are many opportunities afterwards. So, if you prepare your post-thesis period well, from the beginning of the thesis, as an objective, it is something

that works. On the other hand, if you stay locked up in your laboratory for these three years, it can be more complicated....

What sort of skills have you developed during your doctoral studies and which one of them would you rate as the most and least useful?

About core competencies: of course, the fact that you do a thesis on a specific subject makes you an expert on this field. The time you devote to your subject, the people with whom you are surrounded make you an expert.

These skills must be maintained after the doctorate, you must not stop at the doctorate. You have to keep up to date with the latest scientific publications.

About transversal skills, I have the feeling that the doctorate is a lot of self-training. You are sometimes left to yourself. I was lucky enough to have supervisors who followed me a lot and lucky enough to have close exchanges with other researchers who also helped me for three years. The doctoral student has nonetheless a lot of autonomy, he learns to search, to find information, to have a critical look at the information gathered. He learns to sort out this information, to synthesise the information to present it. I found that it was a very strong learning process to be able to build your own idea about a subject. As I said, I had a very interdisciplinary subject, so I had to collect and synthesise data from geography, geology, but also from economics and sociology. So, I was self-educated on many things. It taught me methods to succeed, to synthesise and to bring a critical eye. So, it was very rich!

On a relational level: There are different types of doctorates. For me, it was a doctorate with a partnership with an insurance company and with a public institution, the BRGM (French geological survey). I did not spend my three years at the University. I was housed in the company with which the doctorate was contracted. So, I had contacts in all these areas, both on the administrative and the scientific and technical levels, and this taught me a lot.

I was also involved in the management of the project, I organised presentations to non-scientific partners and managed the budget. So, it took me out of the purely scientific field and it's good to get to grips with the realities of communicating with all the people involved. It's also important to understand their expectations.

For me, the thesis is a real professional experience. It is at this time that I really created my first professional network, which I still have today.

How would you evaluate the skills you acquired during your doctoral training and their relation to your current professional requirements?

It is clear that I still use some of my scientific and technical skills, but some less and less. Because the further you progress in your career, the further you move away from technical production, and the more you are involved in cross-disciplinary work, in leading projects and people. There are quite a few tools and computer models that I no longer use on a daily basis. On the other hand, I use my interpersonal skills more and more and they have developed. Continuing to be curious, to research new information and use these skills, will always be useful for my entire career I think. What I appreciate most is always trying to improve myself, that's what gives salt, that's what gives spice to everyday life!

It's important to constantly question yourself, to look for new solutions to a problem, to be curious about what's being done elsewhere, to have time to keep an eye on watch and to know how to pass on information to the people you work with.

Did your employment after doctoral studies go without problems or was it rather a challenge?

For me, it was very easy! I needed little time to look for a job. Thanks to my contacts, I had a proposal for a postdoc contract before my defence. I knew that I would start one month after my thesis. Then, thanks to exchanges with my network, I was informed of my next position, and then of the third position

I took! So, everything went smoothly. I knew how to seize opportunities as they arose. It was a natural process.

What would you like to share with the current doctoral students and future doctoral graduates?

Being able to do a thesis is a chance!

At the beginning of your career, you have a form of stability, you start with a three-year contract (sometimes more) to do your project. I know that afterwards there is not much stability when the thesis ends for many, it can be very complicated to find their first job, to go through short and precarious contracts. But during the three years of the thesis, we have a form of comfort, that's how I felt. But you have to project yourself. Above all, you must not restrict yourself, not limit yourself. Of course, working on your subject takes up most of your time, but you really have to try to create networks, to meet people in the academic world by going to conferences, by taking part in events, but also outside the academic world, really.

My subject lent itself to meeting experts in non-academic structures, to go and collect data in the field, to question them about their way of doing things, about their jobs. So, I learned a lot outside the academic sphere. From the start, you have to consider finishing your thesis with contacts in the business world and in local authorities, especially if you are not aiming for a research career.

In fact, these people are in demand for contacts with academics. Very often they don't know who to contact, so you mustn't hesitate to go out, to go towards these circles. They welcome us with interest and know that we are doctoral students, we have time, we can make ourselves available, we can start to exchange ideas and so they are really very interested. Then when the thesis ends, people remember you, that you were able to answer a question, or bring something interesting for them. It is what will make doors open, that a recruiter will contact you, it is the memory effect! Three years is more than enough time to achieve this result.

I consider that the beginning of my professional career is not the end of my thesis. My thesis is part of my career. I went presenting myself as a young researcher, a professional, not as a student. In the end, that's what we are when we are doctoral students, we are young researchers. If today the doctorate sometimes has difficulty being recognised in professional circles, it is perhaps because it is presented as three years of training studies, whereas in fact it is the first three years of the beginning of a career and later of an expert in his or her field. If we consider that from the outset we are legitimate to go and establish relations with the non-academic world, I think that it works.

What message would you like to pass on to people who employ or would employ doctors?

I would like to say that many employers stop at the diploma, but for me, it is not having 5 or 8 years of higher education that was the determining factor. On the other hand, during these three years, I have acquired skills. This is what should be valued, much more than having the title of doctor. The most important thing, in my opinion, is not the degree, it's the fact that I've been able to say for three years that I've done research with academic partners, with professionals, and project management. It is valued, it allows us to say 'I have skills to showcase'. If we explain it in the language that recruiters understand, I think it can work. Recruiters should not stop at the title of doctor, and the preconceived ideas they may have about a title. They need to ask each doctor candidate what they did during their doctoral thesis. They need to see what skills they have acquired. We have to look at what lies behind a doctorate subject, it's a professional experience full-fledged. From the beginning of my thesis, I considered myself not as a student, but as a professional who is training. You train throughout your career, permanently and this is still the case for me today.

Thank you Camille!