

Title: Risk Perceptions and Actions to Reduce the Impacts of Floods in the Czech Republic

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Abstract

Since the democratic transition in the Czech Republic in 1989, floods have continued to create crisis situations in 1997, 2002, 2006, 2007 and 2013. The damages and losses due to frequent floods and inadequate supports from insurance companies have impacted people's risk perception and coping mechanisms in the Czech Republic. Disaster management is considered as a responsibility of the government, where citizens have limited role. However, frequent floods in the late twentieth century changed the risk perception that questioned the relevance of conventional solution of disaster risk reduction in the Czech Republic. The study understands, in what way is the conventional approach of flood disaster management influencing the community and the local government to decide strategies in flood risk reduction? How does the culture of dependency on the government in risk reduction impact the risk perception and cooperation with the government? This research has sought to understand the perception of people and the government about the flood disaster and resilience to cope with increasing natural hazards. It also seeks to explore how risk perception and the traditional understanding about floods impacting the efforts to work collaboratively.

It is found that the characteristics of risk perception vary with individual characteristics, physical characteristics, economic characteristics and experience and knowledge of floods. Risk preparedness largely depends on risk perception and prior experiences of natural hazards. Villagers in the Czech Republic are aware, but no prior experience leads them to be least worried about the possible risks. People living in the floodplains are not worried about risk, because floods have become a part of their lives. A flood becomes disaster when it is beyond the everyday experiences. The flood influences people living at risk to adopt strategies based on capability and risk-benefit trade-offs.

The research has found that coordination between villagers and local government, acceptability of local leadership, social capital and social network, community resilience and sense of community changes the risk perception in the Czech Republic. Villagers in the Czech Republic cannot follow the complex analysis of forecasting of floods. They trust the local government to receive the early warning. They also trust the efforts adopted by the local government to reduce the impacts of floods. The local government cannot overlook the people's voices against taking disaster prevention measures. Therefore, risk communication between people and local government becomes crucial in disaster risk reduction in the Czech Republic.

It is not only the risk perception, but consciousness of self-responsibility towards society that influence people to engage in disaster risk reduction. Villagers help each other, support the

government personnel and work collectively during such emergencies, but the trend of collectively is very low. The influence of top-down approach in disaster management in the Czech Republic has made people highly dependent toward the government. The least involvement of people in disaster management made them least prepared and least resilient. On the other hand, the government is also not able to implement disaster prevention measures without the consent of the people at the grassroots level. Negligence of people's opinion in disaster reduction made them to distance themselves from disaster reduction activities. Therefore, people's willingness to contribute in disaster risk reduction is needed to enhance the resilience to cope with potential risks of floods in the Czech Republic.