



(Non-)Knowledge and Vulnerability – Conceptual reflections and empirical results of an investigation of the 2002 flood in Eilenburg (Saxony; Germany)

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Commonly, the assessment of social vulnerability takes into account the exposure of people at risk, the physical materiality (infrastructure, buildings etc) and/or political-economical variables (income, ethnicity, gender etc.). This paper wants to widen the discussion by focussing on the distribution and embedding of knowledge with regard to natural hazards. In modernity, it is argued, the distribution of knowledge between “disaster experts” and “lay-people” has to be critically analyzed in order to assess the vulnerability of communities. The first part of this paper therefore concentrates on conceptual reflections the second part focuses on the methodology employed in a case study. It presents first empirical findings of a representative household survey (n = 300) and qualitative interviews, both conducted within the EU-funded project FLOODsite in the city of Eilenburg (inhabitants 18.000).

The conceptual part departs from the geographical literature on natural hazards and vulnerability and incorporates theoretical reflections of the sociology of disaster and risk. Thereby it will be demonstrated why the role of knowledge should be considered more rigorously in vulnerability research. The methodological part centres on the question of how the interrelatedness of knowledge and vulnerability was investigated in the case study. It will be shown that the analysis of social networks is crucial to explain the interrelatedness of knowledge and vulnerability. The paper therefore differentiates between “soft” (family, friends, and neighbours) and “hard” (organisation, municipality, police, etc.) networks. It will analyse the reasons for the malfunction of the interaction between both networks during the 2002 flood in Eilenburg and the con-

sequences this had for the vulnerability of the community. Finally, the paper reflects upon the implications of the empirical findings for the assessment of vulnerability.