

Flash-floods in Catalonia: the social perception in a context of changing vulnerability

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In the Iberian Peninsula, Catalonia is one of the areas that is most affected by floods. Every year, during the summer or at the beginning of autumn, flash floods affect the littoral mountains or the Pyrenees region, although sometimes they can also occur in spring. Usually, the maximum accumulated rainfall is less than 100 mm, with instantaneous intensities above 3 mm/min, but sometimes more than 200 mm can be recorded 24 hours. This has been the case of the flash flood events recorded on 10th June 2000, 31-1st July 2002, 11th April 2002, 18th October 2003 and 12-14 th September 2006. However, other events with less precipitation, like 8-9th October 2002, 2nd August 2005, 11-13th October 2005 and 13-15th November 2005, can have a major social impact. This contribution, developed in the framework of the European Project FLASH and the WMO project MEDEX, analyzes the different social perception of those events.

The contribution takes into account that a number of perception studies in connection to floods have been already carried out. Indeed, the studies on floods were the first to include the psychological aspects accompanying flood events. Some authors distinguished three groups of factors influencing amplification of the perceived risk: personal characteristics, situational factors and risk characteristics. Situational factors are very important, in particular media attention. The media is one of the most important sources of disaster information and it significantly influences or shapes how the population and the government view, perceive, and respond to hazards and disasters. Others authors goes even further and claims that the perception of risk is reflected by the media's coverage of these events. All the studies suggest that the power of the mass media in the perception of a natural disaster, like for example floods, is essential.

This study will assess the perception of flood risk in the population of Catalonia on the basis of information provided by the mass media, in particular by the press, since it has been demonstrated that the mass media are a key element in constructing social perception.