



Multidisciplinary approach in natural hazards: avoiding misunderstandings

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It is today widely recognised that a multidisciplinary approach is worthwhile when it comes to natural hazards. While the knowledge of scientists from different fields about those problematic is getting deeper everyday, the need for a brighter understanding of natural hazards and the risk they induce becomes more and more obvious. A risk situation cannot be limited to a single scientific field. It involves many components, each of them studied by a specific science. The understanding of the whole question of risk requires a dialogue between those sciences.

The large amount of research projects based on a multidisciplinary approach shows that this need for dialogue is known and accepted. However, the participants of such projects encounter a problem in communication: they do not speak the same language.

Even though scientists are willing to share with colleagues from other fields, they are facing the hinder of the specific terminology they use in their work. Social scientists, natural scientists and engineering scientists do not speak the same language, although they might use the same words. For instance, basic terms like "risk", "vulnerability", or concepts like "risk management" or "governance" might have very different meanings according to the scientists involved. The approach of risk situation itself is specific to each science.

How can this hindrance be avoided?

The first step of every research project (and further, every work in group on a risk related situation) could be a framing about terminology. It is necessary that all partners acknowledge the different vocabularies involved, and understand that their background and professional context influences their understanding of terms and concepts.

The aim is not to negate those vocabularies, nor to define a new one that would fit to all sciences. It is to ensure that all partners are aware of the possible misunderstandings and accept that others might use other terminologies. Thus, major misunderstandings could be avoided.

Such a framing process should be held for every situation involving cooperation, because the context and the situation are also influencing the understanding. Taking into account dissimilarities from the start and further, when working together, will make multidisciplinary projects more fruitful. For this purpose, the presentation will introduce possible actions and guidelines to help finding a common language.