



Risk perception and communication in Catalonia

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People do not necessarily share the same perceptions of the significance and underlying causes of different risks and how to proceed in front of them. Whyte (1986) distinguish three groups of factors influencing amplification of the perceived risk: personal characteristics, situational factors (media attention and others) and risk characteristics. Besides this, the risk communication involves many agents like government agencies, universities and research centers and the media. How are developed the risk communication by these agents? Among the recipients are some population groups that do not receive this information correctly. The identification of these sectors and the deficits in the communication chain are key steps to improve communication strategies. With this aim, the present contribution shows the result of the integration and synergy between the studies on risk perception developed by the GAMA team of the University of Barcelona and based in the analysis of media and social networks and internet (Llasat et al, 2009a, 2009b; Llasat-Botija and Llasat, 2010), and the analysis developed through questionnaires by Civil Protection of Catalonia as well as their own experience on risk communication to society.

This contribution starts from the analysis of the newspaper articles on natural hazards published since 1982 by a Spanish journal (Llasat et al, 2009b), analyzes the breakpoint produced on last years, and its evolution, as a consequence of the introduction of news in internet as well as social networks, blogs, you-tube, distribution lists and other applications, and analyzes the results obtained from the surveys about natural risk perception conducted by the General Direction of Civil Protection in Catalonia, for the period 2008-2010, with a sample composed by one thousand people approximately. According to this study, only 15% of surveyed people consider that their region can be affected by risks associated with natural phenomena like floods, windstorms, snowfalls or forest fires (in this order), although some scientific studies and reports show that more than the major part of the population in Catalonia lives in regions that can be frequently affected by heavy rains, floods or other hydrometeorological risks (Vilaplana and Payàs, 2008; Llasat, 2010). The study also shows that people living in small towns have a higher risk perception level, while there are sectors of the population with low risk awareness, particularly between young people and people with low educational level or immigrants. This result corroborates not only the hypothesis of White, but also corroborates the conclusion of Hoffman and Oliver-Smith (2002) that consider risks that are constructed socially are experienced differently by different individuals or groups of individuals within one particular society, thereby leading to multiple individual perceptions of one and the same event. Finally, the poster shows some potential answers to these deficiencies. The last objective is to establish new and innovative ways to transfer the natural hazards knowledge to practitioners, to overpasses the short term interest in natural disasters during the crisis and non-crisis period, and to improve the disaster risk reduction approach following the Hyogo recommendations.