



Internal communication: Challenges and opportunities in the application of Hazard Zone Planning

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Natural hazards are since always challenging alpine societies and their managing institutions. The accelerated societal change and economic development of the last century in alpine regions created rising potential losses, resulting in higher risk, even regardless of changing hazard characteristics due to climate change. The impetus to act for alpine societies leads changes in management concepts, as the shift from hazard to risk management in the last decade illustrates. Hazard Zone Planning has proved to be an efficient non structural tool for long term risk reduction in alpine environments, by regulating the forms of use in hazard prone areas. Focussing on the practical application of Hazard Zone Planning, major communication challenges arise as multiple local stakeholders hold different interests in the scarce remaining land and the integrative character of Hazard Zone Planning forces multiple actors to collaborate across their disciplinary borders. The overarching paradigm of sustainability in regional (risk-) governance demands to integrate all parties' economical, ecological and social claims. But how to turn this sophisticated demand into institutional planning practice on the ground?

Our contribution presents the results of an internal communication analysis, as basis for a holistic, application-oriented communication concept in alpine risk management, to enhance the practical applicability of an expert driven risk management concept serving the public.

The Autonomous Province of Bolzano – South Tyrol recently introduced an innovative Hazard Zone Planning scheme, developed upon the long run experiences of neighbouring countries. Nevertheless external communication aspects is only marginally included in the concept, whilst internal communication is completely neglected. Internal communication in South Tyrolean Hazard Zone Planning takes places within and between five specialised authorities, consulting engineers and the local administration of 116 municipalities. Participating observation, guided by a steadily evolving observation scheme was applied in 13 municipality specific internal coordination meetings. Due to the running process of Hazard Zone Planning data collection had to follow three main criteria: i) no interruption or delay of the planning process ii) as little influence on the communication process as possible.

The results show briefly, that internal communication in Hazard Zone Planning in South Tyrol is strongly characterized by the tight personal relationships among key actors in different positions. This represents strength when it comes to interdisciplinary cooperation and mutual trust between the involved institutions. Specialised knowledge and relevant experience are strongly connected to key persons, representing a weakness of the communication system in case of individual absent. The most striking weakness is the lack of general project management and missing moderation of the meetings, which is due to unclear roles - or missing role descriptions - of the parties. Unsettled liability questions, the little everyday-life-relevance of the topic and laggard communities are identified as potential threads in the Hazard Zone Planning process. It is shown, that even in well advanced risk management concepts a great gap between theoretical requirements and practical implementation exists. Hazard Zone Planning in South Tyrol lacks of internal communication structures. Internal Communication poses several challenges from internal organisation to project management, that have to be overcome as a precondition for effective external communication especially when it comes to real participation efforts. Risk communication in general is an ongoing process. Project oriented structures as detected in Hazard Zone Planning seem not to be appropriate therefore in the long run.