



Social attitudes towards floods in Poland - spatial differentiation

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Our paper discusses results of research conducted in Southern Poland focusing on social attitudes towards floods – natural hazards frequently observed in Poland. Lately (e.g. 1997, 2001, 2010) several hundred thousand of people suffered from floods occurring in all examined communities.

Presented analyses are based on questionnaire survey in which several criteria were used to select places for studies: objective degree of risk, prior experience of extreme events, size of community, strength of social bonds, social capital and quality of life. Nearly 2000 responses (from 9 communities) were gathered from the survey.

Our main research questions were following:

- are there differences between attitudes in those communities depending on how frequently they have experienced floods?
- does settlement size have an impact on social attitudes towards floods, especially on mitigation behaviour?
- are urban inhabitants less adapted to floods be upheld and do rural communities show more activity in the face of natural disasters?
- what do information and education policies concerning floods look like?

Three dimensions of social attitudes towards natural hazards were analyzed: cognitive (knowledge and awareness of local hazards), emotional (feelings towards hazards, like concern and anxiety); and instrumental (actions taken in response to a potential natural disaster). A combination of these three dimensions produces various types of perception and behaviour towards the perceived hazard (Raaijmakers et al., 2008): ignorance when the local population is unaware of a threat and therefore develops no concern and takes no preventive actions; safety when the local population is aware of a threat, but regards its level as either low or acceptable and is therefore not concerned with the threat and makes no preparations for a disaster; risk reduction when a high level of awareness and concern produces the mechanism of reducing the cognitive dissonance and denial of a disaster threat; the local population resigns from taking protective action or passes the responsibility on to the authorities; control when an aware population takes preventive action that help reduce their concern. Above analyses led to comparison of Polish and European social attitudes towards floods.