



Interventionist and participatory approaches to flood risk mitigation decisions: two case studies in the Italian Alps

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Flood risk mitigation decisions pose key challenges not only from a technical but also from a social, economic and political viewpoint. There is an increasing demand for improving the quality of these processes by including different stakeholders - and especially by involving the local residents in the decision making process - and by guaranteeing the actual improvement of local social capacities during and after the decision making.

In this paper we analyse two case studies of flood risk mitigation decisions, Malborghetto-Valbruna and Vipiteno-Sterzing, in the Italian Alps. In both of them, mitigation works have been completed or planned, yet following completely different approaches especially in terms of responses of residents and involvement of local authorities. In Malborghetto-Valbruna an 'interventionist' approach (i.e. leaning towards a top down/technocratic decision process) was used to make decisions after the flood event that affected the municipality in the year 2003. In Vipiteno-Sterzing, a 'participatory' approach (i.e. leaning towards a bottom-up/inclusive decision process) was applied: decisions about risk mitigation measures were made by submitting different projects to the local citizens and by involving them in the decision making process.

The analysis of the two case studies presented in the paper is grounded on the results of two research projects. Structured and in-depth interviews, as well as questionnaire surveys were used to explore residents' and local authorities' orientations toward flood risk mitigation. Also a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) involving key stakeholders was used to better understand the characteristics of the communities and their perception of flood risk mitigation issues. The results highlight some key differences between interventionist and participatory approaches, together with some implications of their adoption in the local context. Strengths and weaknesses of the two approaches, as well as key challenges for the future are also discussed.