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(Re)politicizing disaster governance: Simulating Conflicting Interests Over Matters of Concern By Means Of A Board Game

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The disaster risk reduction (DRR) community tends to treat disasters and risk in a managerial and technocratic way, thereby disregarding the highly political nature of DRR. An alternative epistemology of disasters, as matters of concern, is proposed and tested. Mobilizing concepts from Chantal Mouffe and Bruno Latour, this paper illustrates how DRR can be transformed into a public issue. It is argued that education and policy making on DRR would benefit from a recognition of the hybrid nature of disasters. A serious game is used to test proposed epistemology. The board game simulates political decision making on the reduction of risks due to floods and landslides in West Uganda. It is hypothesized that the game can generate an ideal speech scenario that fosters discussions among players and possibly even creates a space of political confrontation. Discussions during ten gameplays in South-West Uganda have been recorded and transcribed. Participants effectively experience affects, power relations and confrontations during the game, but a call for consensus and technical solutions are sometimes used to prematurely close the discussions and move on with concrete solutions. Insights from this paper contribute to understanding why DRR is frequently treated as a technical issue in local and international disaster governance. Proposed epistemology and approaches are expected to stimulate innovative experiments towards a more political approach of DRR education and policy.