



Hazard memories and the importance of risk awareness for current adaptation strategies

B.M.W. Ratter and N. Kruse

Hamburg, Department of Geography, Geography, Germany (kruse@geowiss.uni-hamburg.de)

The North Sea coast in general is a storm surge and flood prone area and for centuries the coastal population had to find ways how to deal with it. The last major harmful flood happened in 1962 where 315 people lost their lives. Not the least this harmful event led to an awareness of a constant threat of storm surges along the coast. After 1962 immense flood protection measures were constructed and people began to feel safe again. In 1976 a second major storm surge, which was physically even higher than the one in 1962, caused hardly damages – nearly all dikes resisted the flood. This was an argument of safety for the people and the threat of storm surges seemed to be overcome. The faith in technical measures became profound.

But how does the coastal population deal with storm surges today? Do former floods influence their awareness? Is the trust in flood protection still present which would cause difficulties in the realization of adaptation strategies? With the proposed poster we present the analysis of a population survey on risk awareness among the population of 18 communities along the German North Sea coast as well as four East and North Frisian Islands. Furthermore, a special aspect of risk perception among elderly people was analysed – a generation that witnessed the floods in 1962 and 1976. Within a framework of oral history inhabitants of Büsum, a small city at the North Sea coast, were interviewed about their awareness of storm surges. Do they care about storm surges or do they feel safe? Does the experience of 1962 still play a role in the awareness today? Do they feel personally affected?

The objective is to discuss the importance of hazard memories and its relevance in risk perception. Which importance do historical events have in terms of current adaptation strategies? Risk perception is the pre-condition for adaptation strategies being successful within hazard management. Without the appropriate risk awareness the faith in technical measures will prevent suitable adaptation strategies.