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Comparing 'good' risk governance strategies within an EU context: an exploratory framework for cross-case comparisons

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Abstract

The research employs an exploratory cross-case analysis framework developed to compare 'good' risk governance strategies within an EU context. The basic premise for this research is that disaster risk reduction is fostered through 'good' risk governance, which refers to minimizing risk governance deficits (IRGC, 2006, 2009), encouraging good governance practices (CEC, 2001; Fonseka, 2000; UN, 1997), and taking a place-based approach to better understand contextual factors and to be able to consequentially respond to the challenges posed by changing environments. In addressing these challenges, a place-based approach through the analysis of multiple case studies is needed in order to establish an understanding of the local context for risk governance strategies and in trying to develop tailor-made strategies for a local, spatial context. How risks are handled and defined strongly depends upon this context which is determined through physical characteristics as well as socio and cultural values and the local political system in each case (Renn & Walker, 2008; Assmuth *et al.*, 2009; Jungermann *et al.*, 1988). When referring to the EU context, one must consider that each Member State is at a different starting point in their process toward 'good' risk governance.

To garner a greater understanding of the different strategies, a cross-case comparison was conducted featuring four cases of the Marie Curie ITN project 'CHANGES'; namely, the Barcelonnette basin in Alpes des Haute Provence, France; the Fella River catchment in Friuli-Venezia-Giulia region, Italy; the Wieprzówka catchment in Małopolska, Poland; and the Nehoiu catchment in Buzău County, Romania. Preliminary field visits and over 100 semi-structured interviews were completed with a wide range of stakeholders at both local and regional levels including: mayors, municipal technicians, community leaders, fire fighters, policemen, civil protection, environmental protection agency representatives, water board authorities, geological services, spatial planners, regional administrative authorities, scientists, aid agencies, and insurance agencies. Interviews addressed primarily issues pertaining to a set of 'good' risk governance categories and indicators which were previously derived from a desk study of 'good' governance principles and risk governance deficits and were further revised according to an intensive analysis of 22 EU policy documents.

Results featuring the analysis of the first three indicator categories (openness & transparency, accountability, and participation) are presented based on issues arranged by management, assessment, and communication of risks and good practice examples as revealed from the perspective of the stakeholders interviewed. These results indicate that in

terms of communication the public is involved primarily at a consultative level of participation. With respect to management, results from the interviews reveal that there is a clear understanding of which stakeholders should be held accountable for what roles and responsibilities at least within times of crisis. For assessment, the main issue lies in the wide range in availability of resources for risk assessment and updates between cases. Many good practice examples were found in database and data sharing capabilities as well as in providing information to the public and efforts to increase public awareness. Final learning points for local and EU policy-making reveal the need to improve local capacities to enable long term, strategic thinking as well as to encourage efforts toward building a culture of safety.

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