

Review of: "An approach to the background, methods and challenges of research in disasters"

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An approach to the background, methods and challenges of research in disasters

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The article is an ambitious attempt to analyse the historical background of disaster research, and the authors should be commended for taking up this challenge. Disasters are very broad phenomena, encompassing diverse origins, causes, modes of occurrence, dynamics and consequences. They also require comprehensive monitoring, prevention, preparedness, response, recovery and research. Disasters simultaneously overlap and intertwine different fields of natural, human and social sciences. Therefore, the approach to disaster research should be multidisciplinary.

The authors of this short article criticise the current state of affairs in disaster research for still not being comprehensive and collaborative, and call for a turnaround. These efforts will most likely face several challenges identified by the authors of the article: a common conceptual framework and definitions for researchers from different scientific disciplines, the development of specific methods to study complex events, a specific approach to slow-onset disasters and their social, political and cultural impacts, and last but not least, the exploration of optimal prevention and response strategies.

Although the article highlights a few major disaster research efforts in modern human history, a wider range of past research projects and programmes should be included in the analysis to arrive at credible results.[1] One of such research programmes was Crisis Management Europe involving several disasters that occurred in various countries. Perhaps an in-depth study of some research cases should be conducted to identify theoretical concepts, methodological approaches and methods used so that the conclusions are sound and well documented. This would give the authors additional dimensions to discuss the matter creatively and reach comprehensive conclusions. As it stands, the discussion is rather limited, while the conclusions partly repeat the discussion and partly highlight challenges that do not necessarily arise from their analysis of recent disaster research.

Finally, should we realistically expect future disaster-related research to be primarily collaborative, comprehensive, multidisciplinary and based on common conceptual and methodological approaches? Most likely the majority of research in this field will continue to be conducted within different scientific disciplines, or among some of them, with some attempts

at broader interdisciplinary research. This is probably due to theoretical and methodological incompatibility, but also to the financial, organisational and functional limitations of such research projects (programmes). Nevertheless, we should strive to achieve as much collaborative research across disciplines as possible in given circumstances.

[1] One of such interdisciplinary research programmes was Crisis Management Europe, involving a few tens of disasters that occurred in various European and other countries in 1990s and 2000s.