

NUWCRen Seminar 'Managing the response: Achieving unity of effort'

'Citizens and Flooding in The Netherlands'

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Context

■ NUWCRen Network

- Lessons learned, exchange and network formation between US and Dutch institutions in aftermath of Katrina and New Orleans
- Different themes for cooperation and exchange and division of roles between partners

■ Role Disaster Studies Wageningen University

- Community Vulnerability and Resilience
- Community and Citizens' Involvement

Contents paper 'Citizens and Flooding'

- Context
 - Dutch geographic and policy context and associated shifts in disaster (management) paradigms
- Organization of Emergency Response
 - Role institutions
 - Place of community and citizen's involvement
- Nexus between citizens and government in flood response
 - Perceptions (myths), realities (overview studies)
 - Relations and potentials of increased involvement
- Conclusions and Policy Inferences

Geographic and policy context

- From resistance to a risk approach
- From a feeling of 100% safety to the recognition of residual risk and to associated policy measures to prepare when disaster strikes
- Dikes were less safe than was always thought
- Mitigation, preparedness became part of disaster management response
- Planning, zoning, evacuation, controlled flooding became discussed and implemented
- Recent changes that created societal resistance

Involving people

- Risk approach involves a different governance model than a technical engineering-based resistance model
- More coordination between different ministries and departments
- Lower-level authorities, private corporate sector civil-society actors, communities and citizens
- New and somehow problematic; many disaster exercises still conceived as top-down and professional efforts, requires change of attitude

Zelfredzaamheid (self-help, citizens' self-reliance)

- Zelfredzaamheid notion introduced in 2009 by the Minister of Interior and Kingdom Relations
- Traditionally a physical hazard modification approach through engineering solutions
- 25 safety regions that also look after preparedness, but are still based primarily on traditional (first) response organizations
- No explicit citizens' involvement in policies and operations

Zelfredzaamheid-II

- 'Zelfredzaamheid' refers to an individual's capacity to save one-self and others when disaster strikes, and to employ whatever resources are available
- It refers to citizens as opposed to professional disaster response agencies
- Related terms: Coping capacity, private (non-state) action, resilience
- Resilience less instantaneous, more long-term, socially embedded and structural

Nexus government-citizens

- Paper provides overview of 18 recent studies on this topic
- Government policy of preparedness, ‘think ahead’ campaign, emergency kit at home
- Citizens largely accept co-responsibility, know about emergency kit campaign and accept the need to prepare themselves: but *do not do it*
- E.g. only 0.3% acquired an emergency kit
- What are the reasons for this behavior?

Dutch citizens' attitudes

- Not really worried; flooding not a priority risk
- Other risks are seen as more urgent (crime, recession etc.)
- Do not collect information for preparedness
- Rely on government
- Slightly different picture at areas that experienced flood (threats)
- Overall picture: an unconcerned, unprepared Dutch citizen that is relying largely on his/her government

Dutch citizens' behavior

- No evidence for disaster myths (citizens panic, show apathy, and behave irresponsibly and a-socially)
- Citizens adopt both intuitive and more analytic approaches, but both tend to be right in practice
- Citizens are not only involved in first response, but also in after-care and recovery (nearly all tasks, sustained period)
- Professional agencies do not involve citizens easily: still led by 3C (chaos, command, control) and associated mistrust

Advantages of citizens' involvement

- Expansion of capacity
- Timeliness (golden hour): life saving and rescue
- Local knowledge and resources
- Stimulates social and emotional recovery
- Involvement in planning and response alters attitudes more than dissemination and awareness campaigns
- Case studies corroborate findings (Volendam, polder-crash) leading to a more welcoming attitude among professionals

Conclusions

- Paradox of growing awareness, reduced safety and acceptance of co-responsibility among citizens combined with lack of preparedness, continued reliance on government
- ‘Zelfredzaamheid’ needs further acceptance among citizens and professional responders and needs a change from an individualistic to a more social and community-based approach
- Advantages now slowly recognized
- But: there is little documented local evidence

Recommendations

- Fully recognize relevance of citizens' involvement
- Change negative professional attitudes
- Involve citizens in exercises, planning, preparedness and response
- Explore a long-term, social & community-based resilience approach vs. the individualistic and momentary 'zelfredzaamheid' model
- Carry out empirical case studies and study 'black hole' of community involvement by comparing and learning from US and developing world

Thank you!

