

# Towards no-regrets: lessons learnt from the flood in Germany in 2021



Joy Ommer | Milan Kalas | Jess Neumann | Sophie Blackburn | Hannah L. Cloke

## Thinking local

*Oh that doesn't happen here anyway*

*I didn't know until now that this is a risk area. I have always assumed that the greatest danger in this area comes from the Rhine*

*The creek has already overflowed once in the past, the reason was heavy rain as well as debris and mud running down the slope*

- Flooding was not only **caused by** rivers but primarily by **creaks**
- **Awareness of risk** areas was very low with close to 50%
- The extremeness of the event **exceeded the imagination** of many citizens
- **Local differences** that increased flooding and its impact were identified by citizens
- Flooding needs to be understood in a **landscape perspective** & flood risk management needs to be further **localised**
- Increasing risk awareness and understanding with Nature-based Solutions and citizen science by **involving local communities**

## Moving from dependency to shared responsibility

*The extent was unpredictable in the area. When it was foreseeable [...], the public sector and the local helpers were overwhelmed*

*Draw up and communicate emergency plans regionally*

*Clarify responsibilities*

*During the flood event, it became clear that the population had little risk awareness of such risks, and only little willingness to take preventive measures and inform themselves*

*Better educational work, including in schools as a preventive measure (expansion of geography lessons)*

- Citizens **expect to be totally supported and protected**
- Flood risk management roles and **responsibilities** as perceived by citizens are **clearly separated**
- People are greatly **willing to be engaged** in local actions and decision-making
- Need for **bridging the interface** between citizens and authorities
- Need to identify opportunities for **shared responsibility**

## Building with and on communities

*Would always help immediately. At first, I was reluctant to help drive and was grateful that people called for help on Facebook...*

*Without self-help/own initiative/neighbourhood help everything would have been worse*

*We have set up a flood protection initiative with four affected locations and have had good cooperation so far with the city and the relevant specialist authorities*

*Strengthen the active exchange and cohesion within communities so that the "village radio" (Dorffunk) can be used*

*Mixed teams of volunteers and professional helpers*

- **Solidarity** was a key value
- One of the main actions citizens would do in the future is to inform and help others
- **Social media** was important for warnings and organising help
- Need for **enhancing bottom-up** risk management
- **Fostering of community initiatives** to bridge the interface between citizens and local authorities

## Acting with no-regrets

*We have experienced that there is nothing you can do in an emergency, you are powerless*

*Misjudged risk*

*I would do better to prepare and watch the [water] levels closely*

*I would decide based on the amount of rain expected. [...] With the usual amounts (approx. 40l/m<sup>2</sup>), I remain calm*

*Take your own initiative and don't just sit and think nothing will happen*

- A remaining challenge is the **interpretation of warnings** and translation into actions
- Many people **did nothing** (in terms of preparedness or response) due to multiple reasons (e.g., no time, unsure what to do, underestimation of the event)
- **Regrets** were mentioned linked to actions but mainly to inactions
- Need for co-developing local and individual **emergency plans**
- Need for local **training for worst-case scenarios**

## The Survey

- Disseminated in Rhineland Palatinate & North Rhine-Westphalia
- Via social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, LinkedIn)
- 438 responses
- 64.8% lived in an own home, 29% in a rented home, 3.2% with their parents
- 65% were in the age of 25-54

*Note: callouts present quotes from survey participants*

## Contact:

joy.ommer@pgr.reading.ac.uk