

Natural Hazards and Disaster Risk Reduction Policies

Loredana Antronico, Fausto Marincioni (Eds.)

People, places and volcanoes. A study on risk perception in the Azores (Portugal)

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Abstract

Volcanic vulnerable areas are often populated, despite the risk of an eruption, with severe long-term consequences. Thus, understanding risk perception is of major importance, as it can foster effective risk communication and inform interventions to reduce vulnerability and enhance resilience. Volcanic areas are often beautiful and fertile, therefore used for multiple purposes, creating the perception of benefits. The affective relationship between people and places also provides feelings of safety, belonging and connectedness. This study explores the relationship between the perceived living place benefits and the volcanic risk perception of 530 residents in the Azores, following a mixed-methods approach and using a self-completion questionnaire. Participants perceived volcanic risk as moderate, contradicting previous studies. Results point to risk devaluation. The most mentioned living place benefits were natural benefits and benefits contributing to well-being and satisfaction. No significant risk perception variations between groups of perceived benefits were found. It is assumed that the negative affect associated with an eruption conflicts with the perceived positive living place benefits, leading to minimization of cognitive dissonance and denial of volcanic hazard, reinforcing the need to foster volcanic educational efforts in the Azores.

Keywords: volcanic risk perception, living place benefits, volcanic risk devaluation, affect heuristic, cognitive dissonance.

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