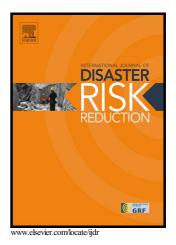
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Universal or context-specific social vulnerability drivers – understanding flood preparedness in southern Poland

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Abstract

Social vulnerability assessments rely on two approaches: case studies of at-risk populations and geospatial models using census data. Various authors have proposed that the design of quantitative analyses could benefit from the results of qualitative research. This expectation comes from an assumption that the nature of social vulnerability drivers is universal. Regarding this hypothesis as dubious, the authors embarked upon testing whether different geographic, historical, social and economic settings would produce similar sets of indicators explaining social vulnerability to floods, thus justifying the application of such variables in generalised spatial models. After theoretical considerations, the authors selected demographics and the socio-economic status as two groups of variables covering potential drivers of social vulnerability influencing the flood preparedness of the households involved in the study. The model includes control variables addressing prior flood experience and flood risk perception. The data was obtained from a survey of 726 households in eight research areas of southern Poland selected to provide a good variety of post-disaster communities based on several criteria. The results confirm that preparedness behaviour of communities at risk is influenced by context-specific social and economic factors that cannot be generalised. Among these factors the ones that represented human and social capital came out to be significant drivers in the highest number of cases regardless of the demographic makeup of the household. However, the number one flood preparedness driver in terms of both the significance level and consistency was the sense of agency and the ability to mitigate flood damage, which reflected the respondent households' motivational vulnerability.

Keywords:

social vulnerability, flood preparedness, flood, case studies, Poland

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