

ZiF-Research Group *Communicating Disaster***Closing Conference “Dealing with the Disasters of Others”**

26-28 January 2012

Presentation:

Communicating Disaster: Framing a New Research Program

Heike Egner, Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt (heike.egner@aau.at)

Marén Schorch, ZiF Bielefeld (maren.schorch@uni-bielefeld.de)

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Location: Center for Interdisciplinary Research, Bielefeld, Germany; Room 222 “Plenarsaal”

Abstract:

This introductory talk to the closing conference of the ZiF-research year will give insights along four main lines:

1. We will point to the “communicative blind spot” of the field of established disaster research which traditionally focuses on the planning, management and mitigation processes in the case of a disaster. By doing so, disaster research somewhat naturally falls into the “trap” of being too close to the logics and, thus, the consequential necessities of these practical field and activities. By being involved into planning, management and mitigation, it is often difficult to keep a distant view which is necessary to analyze the social dynamics behind or more fundamentally: the communicative and societal processes that characterise and even constitute disasters. Thus, the structures as well as the dynamics of different disasters in regard to their communicative aspects are not really understood to date.
2. For achieving a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of disasters we propose a twofold way utilizing an image from photography: We suggest to *zoom in* to get more detailed close-ups by using qualitative methods to analyse and understand the micro-structures of the communicative processes of disasters and at the same time to *zoom out* to get more distant view by applying second-order-observation.
3. For structuring the now ending research year we had used a temporal heuristic similar to the risk management cycle to differentiate the communicative processes and dynamics before, during and after the extreme event (resulting in the phases “alarm communication”, “communications for coping with disasters” and “communications on risk and evaluation”). Looking back we will evaluate this heuristic and show its pros and cons for a research program on disaster research.
4. Additionally, we identified “spatialisation” as a crucial part of the social and communicational dynamics of disasters, since most processes connected to disasters generate spatial effects which create differences that as a matter of fact make a difference – for the affected, the disaster managers, the observers, the media etc.

The suggested framework corresponds with some of the papers that will be presented within the context of the conference and intends to stimulate further, enriching debates.

For further questions on the conference or the research group, please contact the research group assistant:

Marén Schorch
Center for Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF)

Tel.: +49 (0)521 106-2776
communicating_disaster@uni-bielefeld.de