

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

26-28 January 2012

Presentation:**“Space matters” – The Spatiality of Risk**

Valerie November, EPFL Lausanne, Switzerland

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

Abstract:

Space matters! In this keynote, this expression - commonly used to highlight the importance that should be given to spaces - will be considered in the context of risk. What does examining space and risks in conjunction actually mean?

Risks are often studied on the basis of the context within which they emerge. Many studies also emphasise the local characteristics that determine risk identification. These studies clearly show that the relationship between risk and territory is highly complex, and that only a detailed analysis of local areas and contexts can help us to understand risks. Numerous studies have been done on spatial inequalities and risks, giving rise to a wealth of literature on vulnerability and the extension of the notion of environmental justice to include these issues. It has also been demonstrated that one’s relationship to territory (in particular whether one is a resident or not) has a bearing on the way risks are assessed.

However, these studies address only one facet of the relationship between risk and territory, since they fail to take into account the way in which the risks themselves help to transform spaces. I will show that both facets of this relationship need to be addressed in order to understand risks, and that the spatial dynamics of risk must be taken into account if we intend to achieve a comprehensive understanding of risk. Such a comprehensive view is in general unusual because risks tend to be studied in isolation, and only very rarely considered in combination. Only by studying this dual relationship and by examining various types of risks within the same study will enable us to identify what I call the “spatiality of risk”.

For further questions on the conference or the research group,
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