

## Research Group „Communicating Disaster“ (2010-2011)

## Workshop

**‘Disasters – Mobility – Communications:  
Exploring the Links’**

May 16-17, 2011 (Long Table)

## Organisers:

**Oliver Bakewell** (Oxford University), **Katharina Inhetveen** (LMU Munich),  
**Andreas Pott** (University of Osnabrück)**Outline**

Disasters are almost invariably associated with an increase in mobility. On the one hand, those living in the area directly affected by the disaster are confronted with decisions about whether to stay or to leave the disaster site; and if they go, they have to decide when, where and with whom to go, how long to stay away, and how to keep contact and stay informed about the changing conditions at their home. These necessary decisions are far more complex than the seemingly self-evident, often taken-for-granted urge to run away from disaster.

On the other hand, disasters usually stimulate socio-political responses from the humanitarian regime which entails movement towards the disaster site. A wide range of actors including government departments, aid agencies (including national and international NGOs and UN agencies), donors and media organizations face decisions about how far they should immerse themselves in the disaster. Should they decide to do so, their responses regularly include goals and strategies concerned with the mobility of the disaster ‘victims’: the affected population is to be evacuated, to be made to leave, to be made to stay; people are to be channelled to certain sites, to be kept away from others, to be hosted and controlled in shelters, to be relocated temporarily or permanently, avoiding or gradually leading to migration processes. It is clear then that disasters almost inevitably entail making mobility decisions. However, these decisions not only deal with enabling movement: efforts to manage disaster-related mobility typically involve processes of immobilization as well. Where mobility occurred in largely unproblematic, unreflected ways before a disaster, it may be addressed as a problem, controlled, and regulated afterwards. Mobilization and immobilization in the wake of disasters can be considered as two aspects of the socio-political processes of organizing and ordering mobility.

These processes of decision making about mobility rest on the exchange of information between different actors and across space. Those directly affected by the disaster need rapidly to activate their local, national and transnational networks in order to identify their options for moving and to mobilize the necessary resources. Information about their mobility – how many go and where they move to – is an essential ingredient for the decision making of humanitarian actors responding to the disaster. Moreover, part of their response is likely to involve developing communication strategies to control mobility – to persuade people to leave or go to particular places.

In the light of these observations, this workshop aims to explore the relationship between the flow of information and the flows of people during disasters. To date, such issues have largely been dealt with by practitioners, but we are especially interested in perspectives from various academic disciplines and will discuss empirical as well as theoretical questions in the workshop, for example:

- How do those affected by disaster make decisions about mobility, and in what ways are decisions negotiated or made for them by disaster response agencies or political bodies?
- Are there typical process-related trajectories of decision making, including revisions and modifications of mobility decisions? Which significant contexts and constraints can be identified by following up these trajectories of mobility and/or migration decisions in a processual perspective?
- How do communications between disaster response agencies on the one hand and those directly affected on the other hand influence observable practices of mobility in the wake of disaster?

- What are the assumptions and constructions – such as mappings, interpretations of help and disaster, perceptions of mobility and sedentary belonging – that are underlying organizational plans and institutionalized practices of mobilization and immobilization, including evacuation, sheltering, channelling flight routes, or organized return?
- Which actual mobility routes and practices occur from the interplay between the interpretations of those who are directly affected, the interpretations of the agencies of disaster response, and the interpretations conveyed by the media? Which effects arise from the differences in power and resources that exist between the disaster response and humanitarian aid regimes versus those affected by disaster?

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## Schedule

### Monday, May 16

10:30-11:00	Coffee
11:00-12:30	<b>Introduction:</b> Convenors' comments and introductory round (Chair: Andreas Pott)
12:30-13:30	Lunch (at ZiF Cafeteria)
13:30-15:30	<b>Session 1:</b> <b>Interpretations of (disaster) mobility: The affected people's perspective</b> <i>Martin Sökefeld (Munich):</i> Disaster as inhibition: The Attabad landslide and the obstruction of mobility <i>Humaira Daniel (Bonn):</i> Flood and Displacement in Rural Sindh <i>Katharina Inhetveen (Munich):</i> Fleeing from war: Between making a decision and just running Discussion on session 1
15:30-16:00	Coffee with cake
16:00-18:00	<b>Session 2:</b> <b>Interpretations of (disaster) mobility by responding agencies</b> <i>Diana Griesinger (Heidelberg):</i> No 'happy ending' for Nahr el Bared? Relief coordination and power relations between humanitarian actors in a post-conflict Palestinian refugee camp <i>Long, Katy (Oxford):</i> No Entry! Border closures, refugee mobility and humanitarian protection Discussion on session 2
18:00-20:00	Break
20:00	Dinner in town (self-payer)

Tuesday, May 17

9:00-11:00

**Session 3:**

**Contact points of different interpretatory frames**

*Bram Jansen (Wageningen):*

Repatriation Games: the politics of mobility in the early phase of refugee return to Sudan

*Wolfgang Hochbruck / Philipp Balcke (Freiburg):*

Cinematography and Disaster Response

Discussion on session 3

11:00-11:30

Coffee break

11:30-12:30

**Final discussion: Reflections on outcomes** (Chair: Oliver Bakewell)

12:30

Lunch (at ZiF Cafeteria)

End of Workshop