

RISK DIALOGUE ON NATURAL HAZARDS

ACTION PLAN ON RISK DIALOGUE TO PROMOTE PREVENTIVE MEASURES

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INTRODUCTION

The Swiss National Platform for Natural Hazards (PLANAT) is an extra-parliamentary commission that focuses at the strategic level on dealing with natural hazards in Switzerland. In this function it initiates projects aimed at closing existing gaps in documentation and instruments, in particular in the area of prevention.

With the aid of the PLANAT Action Plan on Risk Dialogue, communication concerning risks associated with natural hazards is being systematically developed. The various responsibilities and interfaces, as well as instruments for the involved players, are being defined on the basis of eight different projects.

INSUFFICIENT AWARENESS OF DUTIES, LACK OF ESSENTIAL INSTRUMENTS

PLANAT has been intensively focusing on risk communication and awareness building for a number of years, and in the past it has commissioned a variety of studies depicting the current situation. These include a survey among those Swiss federal authorities that are responsible for dealing with natural hazards in the broadest sense, as well as a workshop on risk dialogue that was held at the March 2009 PLANAT conference.

The findings obtained from the various studies show that risk communication certainly takes place in Switzerland and numerous instruments are available, but there are also many redundancies and a lack of coordination of the involved activities. No complete overview exists of the communication tasks relating to all natural hazards and the full cycle of integral risk management. Furthermore, the studies reveal that at all official levels (federal, cantonal and municipal) the relevant players are either unknown to, or overlooked by, the authorities and the most important instruments for the practical implementation of risk communication are not available (Aller and Wyser, 2009; Wyser and Aller, 2009).

DEVELOPMENT OF AN ACTION PLAN

In order to close the identified gaps relating to coordination and the availability of the necessary instruments, in 2009 and 2010 PLANAT developed a general concept for an action plan, which encompasses eight individual projects that are to be implemented between mid-2010 and the end of 2011. The various activities will involve representatives from PLANAT, federal, cantonal and municipal authorities, insurance companies and the research sector, as well private individuals.

Within the framework of integral risk management the main focus of the risk dialogue is to be placed on prevention. The reason for this is that, in the area of intervention, the most important instruments are already available and cooperation is already fairly well coordinated.

PLANAT drew up its action plan on the basis of the following fields of action:

- Existing know-how is to be bundled and made accessible to all involved players
- Practical support is to be provided, in particular in the form of training in communication and

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- tools for the practical implementation of risk dialogue
- Tasks and responsibilities are to be clarified for, and communicated to, all authority levels and other relevant players
- Networking options and opportunities for exchanges on the topic of risk communication are to be created
- The population is to be sensitised to topics relating to natural hazards

PRACTICAL AIDS

The findings of the individual projects will be available at the end of 2011, and will be published on the PLANAT web site as well as at the PLANAT conference in March 2012. The practical goals of these projects are as follows:

- Development of an efficient web platform for the exchange of know-how between experts and the general population
- Presentation of overviews and coordination bases for tasks and responsibilities in the area of risk communication in Switzerland
- Development of practical risk communication tools for the involved players
- Improved access to all hazard maps
- Development of further education modules in the area of risk communication for specialists and representatives of authorities
- Definition of criteria for incorporating the topic of natural hazards into school curricula
- Development of instruments for media activities, especially in the area of prevention
- Provision of an overview of existing tools and instruments for informing the population

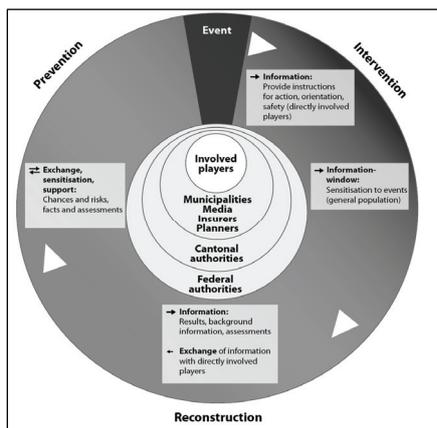


Fig. 1 Overview of risk dialogue on natural hazards encompassing the full cycle of integrated risk management. The focus of the action plan is on prevention.

After the studies have been completed, leadership in the various areas will be handed over to the relevant players. PLANAT will then act as coordination centre for the implementation and institutionalisation of the activities.

With respect to methodology, attention is to be consistently paid to the direct integration of future users, since their participation contributes towards the change of awareness already during the development process, as well as towards the strengthening of the new instruments. The focus is on the municipal level, where the dialogue with the population is to be actually carried out. Thanks to this strategy it will be possible to monitor the effectiveness of the instruments at the time of their introduction and during their subsequent use. The findings thus obtained can be used for other aspects of natural hazards, as well as for other themes of social relevance (social marketing).

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