

“Risk, Society, and Culture” & “Climates of Migration”

Special Sessions - Fourth International Disaster and Risk Conference

The RCC collaborated with the Global Risk Forum GRF Davos to sponsor several events at Fourth International Disaster and Risk Conference (IDRC) Davos 2012. Coordinated by Uwe Lübken (Climates of Migrations) and in response to the jointly released Call for Papers, the RCC put together two plenary sessions as well as a conference session. Read on for more information about the individual sessions and plenaries; participants sponsored by the RCC are indicated with an asterik (*).

Disasters, Environment, and Migration (Plenary Session 8.2)

Session Chair: Bron Taylor (RCC/University of Florida)*

Panelists:

- Jörn Birkmann, Head of Section, United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security UNU-EHS, Bonn, Germany
- Eric Des Marais, Adjunct Faculty, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver, USA
- Uwe Lübken, Research Fellow, Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, Munich, Germany
- Franz Mauelshagen, Executive Board Member and Program Coordinator of "Climate & Culture," Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut, KWI), Essen, Germany
- Anthony Oliver-Smith, Professor, University of Florida, USA

Session Abstract

In recent years there has been a significant world-wide increase in high consequence disasters, extreme events associated with climate change, environmental degradation and ecosystem failure. Poverty, social under-development and fragile statehood too often aggravate these impacts by increasing the vulnerability of people and socio-economic systems – thus contributing to the emergence of humanitarian crises. Moreover, forced migration, social vulnerability and humanitarian crises have contributed to a dramatic change in regional and global mobility patterns, which has already become one of the major effects of the ongoing integration of the world economy. Changing mobility patterns, especially the forced ones, often lead to an erosion of human security in both the countries of origin and the target nations. Political instruments have so far provided inadequate responses to these issues. Hence, there is a need for effective and sustainable global governance of labor mobility, and of displacement and forced migration, especially when disasters, climate change and environmental risks are involved. The current situation suggests that these issues have not been adequately discussed in society at large, and have not been fully understood in interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary ways. History, culture, anthropology and ethics are among the social and human disciplines that have a strong potential to contribute to the debate. There is an urgent need to move the discussion to a new plane and help it inform global decision-making processes.

Open Forum on Risk and Society (Plenary 7) (includes videos from the events)

Session Chair: James Herbert Williams, Professor, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver, USA

Panelists:

- Edgar Grande, Professor, LMU Munich / Board Member - Munich Center on Governance
- Anthony Oliver-Smith, Professor, University of Florida, USA*
- Louis Pauly, Professor, University of Toronto, Canada
- Christoph Stueckelberg, Professor & Executive Director and Founder of Globethics.net, Geneva, Switzerland
- Bron Taylor (RCC/University of Florida)*

Session Abstract

Today's global risks are highly complex and are characterized by great levels of interdependency and uncertainty. Whether one deals with natural disasters and extreme events, climate or other environmental change, technological risks and impacts, energy security or economic and financial risks, the global risk landscape is changing rapidly. Risk analysis and risk management have become truly global issues at the very core of society. It is evident that any meaningful attempt to understand and deal with modern risks will have to address various social, cultural and ethical dimensions and must also look at risk in a historical perspective so as to learn from past experiences. Therefore, broadening and deepening the perspective is essential to embrace the humanities and social sciences. This should be part of an increasingly interdisciplinary approach to the processes of risk analysis, assessment, management, transfer and communication. Such an approach will involve the entire global risk community, composed of researchers, educators, policy-makers and practitioners.

This Open Forum will address the multi-faceted nature of today's global risk landscape and its phenomenology. It will discuss a wide variety of societal, cultural and ethical components and aspects. In particular, panellists will highlight the nature of the interaction between people, their environment, their culture, and risks. Historical and case-based perspectives will be added to the discussion. The Open Forum aims to contribute to current trends in public debate about risk, and help identify solutions, including political ones.

Parallel Session: Climate Change, Migration and Displacement

Chair: Uwe Lübken (RCC)*

Papers:

- Andreas Rechkammer, "Social Perspectives on Land Degradation and Desertification: The Case of Migration and Conflict"
- Giacomo Parrinello (RCC), "From Displacements to Migrations: The Earthquake of Messina (1908) and the Earthquake of the Belice Valley (1968)"*
- Rebecca Hofmann (RCC), "Does Environmental Degradation lead the way out of Chuuk, FSM?"*
- Anja Meutsch, "The Protection of Environmental Refugees through International Public Law"
- Eric Anthony Des Marais, "Developing Best Practices for the Resettlement of Environmental Migrants: The Next Step"

- Ralf Tiety, Sotiria Papadopoulou, and Grit Kümmele, “Climate Change, Climate Refugees and Human Mobility” (Photo Project on Mobility and the Environment)

Individual Paper Abstracts

Social Perspectives on Land Degradation and Desertification: The Case of Migration and Conflict

Andreas RECHKEMMER

Growing evidence on the multifold linkages between climate change, land degradation, the reduction of drylands ecosystem services, poverty, and migratory movements has raised the awareness of scholars and policy makers. These linkages were traditionally understood as the interplay between physical patterns of change and human activities. Recent research efforts, however, have shown that both climate change and desertification must be understood as social phenomena largely driven by human activities. Hence societal risks such as migration and even conflict triggered by climate change and land degradation can be perceived as socially constructed phenomena in the age of global change, and therefore must be addressed by means of an integrated social science effort. This paper introduces the concept of environmental migration and refugees, describes the various aspects of the interaction between climate change, desertification, the displacement of people and further downstream risks, and the difficulties to assess them in a straight-forward manner.

From displacements to migrations: the earthquake of Messina (1908) and the earthquake of the Belice Valley (1968)

Giacomo PARRINELLO

The presentation will focus on post-disaster migrations in historical perspective starting from two case studies: the earthquake of Messina (Sicily, 1908) and the earthquake of the Belice Valley (Sicily, 1968). Both earthquakes had enormously destructive effects on the built environment of large areas. As a consequence, in the aftermaths most of the resident population who had survived left the sites, heading to national and international destinations. In both cases, the authorities encouraged the departure of the survivors, while attempting to control and orient the displacements. Despite these similarities, the two case studies diverge considerably if observed on the mid and long-time scale. From 1909, a great number of refugees started to come back to Messina, and the urban population, reduced to a few thousands in the very aftermath, quickly started to grow. The following decades saw a continuous rise in population, and thirty years after the seism the population of Messina had considerably increased with respect to the eve of the disaster. The Belice Valley experienced the inverse phenomenon: while some survivors returned to the Valley few months after the disaster, nonetheless the demography of the area never recovered from the post-disaster losses. To explain such a difference, many different factors must be taken into account: general demographic trends, labor migrations, local economy, and so forth. The comparison, thus, suggests tempering any deterministic approach to post-disaster migrations. If on the short-time scale one can argue a direct relationship between the earthquakes and the population displacements, when reconsidering the demography of the same areas on a mid and long-term perspective, it becomes clear that other historical forces played a major role in transforming the initial displacements into permanent migrations.

Does environmental degradation lead the way out of Chuuk, FSM?

Rebecca HOFMANN

Pacific islands are physically vulnerable due to a high land-coastline proportion, limited resources and few alternatives which exposes low lying coral atolls as much as the steep volcanic islands to hydrological forces. Chuuk-State, FSM in the central Caroline Islands of Micronesia is comprised of several high volcanic islands (chuuk actually means mountain in the local language) inside one of the world's largest lagoons as well as of various low lying atolls outside the main lagoon. Paired with an increasing demand for cash in an economy that largely relies on natural resources, this physical setting leaves the islands highly sensitive to the effects of human and natural interaction with the environment, such as subsistence activities, for-profit resource extraction, tertiary sector activities, etc., but also to natural calamities such as typhoons, floods and droughts whilst hardly offering sufficient adaptation possibilities or alternatives. The diverging conditions, however, often result in one single action: movement. While education, jobs and health are generally understood to be the three major drivers of migration, environmental factors are often underlying and accompanying the decision-making process. The scope both of distance and time as well as the degree to which environmental issues generate such migrations vary and have to be traced individually. This paper will give an overview of Chuuk's movement dynamics throughout history, with examples from past and present as well as some prospects for the future, extracting the environmental factor of each case.

The Protection of environmental refugees through international public law

Anja MEUTSCH

International law must adapt itself to the realities of its age. One of the most pressing of these realities is the phenomenon of the so called "environmental refugees". The particular question which needs to be addressed is whether the protection of "environmental refugees" is already sufficiently provided for in today's international law or whether the "refugees" are facing a legal gap? This question, in turn, returns us to such basic questions as: What is international law? How is it created? How does or could it solve specific social problems like the protection of environmental refugees? And if there is no protective international law concerning environmental refugees currently, how could the creation of such a law adequately address the issue? Can law provide a solution at all? Or are there other, possibly, better options to address the matter? The present study tries to provide a foundation in order to explore the particular question.

Developing best practices for the resettlement of environmental migrants: the next step

Eric Anthony DES MARAIS

It is expected that climate change will result in increased environmental degradation, which will in turn precipitate an increase in migration. While most natural disasters result in temporary displacement, increased desertification, rising sea levels, and increased flooding will likely correlate to increased permanent migration. In these cases, migration should be viewed as an adaptive response, to be facilitated with careful planning. However, few countries have engaged in any sort of planning for the permanent resettlement of people displaced by disaster. Since hazard resettlement has the potential to marginalize environmental migrants (especially vulnerable populations such as women, children, and older adults), resettlement planning and implementation must incorporate practices that empower these populations. This presentation seeks to first highlight important examples that illustrate the

difficulties of resettlement. This will be followed by a discussion of what might be included in a best practice framework for resettlement. According to the most recent IPCC Climate Change Report, a key to success is a focus on local level adaptation that involves community stakeholders in the planning and decision-making process. Therefore the framework will identify how to involve community members in various stages of plan development including: the assessment of risk and resilience for their community; the assessment of permanent migration as a potential adaptation for their community; the identification of possible locations for resettlement; the assessment of their comparative advantage in their new communities; and collaborative exchanges with their potential hosts. The presentation will conclude with a discussion of areas for research that would help inform the development of best practices for resettlement.

Climate Change, Climate Refugees and Human Mobility (photo project on mobility and the environment)

Ralf TIETZ, Sotiria PAPADOPOULOU, Grit KÜMMELE

The artists and promoters behind the two art events and exhibitions shown at IDRC Davos 2012, "act or react? Sotiria Papadopoulou and Grit Kümmele on Climate Change & Climate Refugees", and "Portraits of Global Change - Risk, Environment and Human Mobility - Visual Artist Ralf Tietz gives your Thoughts a Voice" will present their work, share their insights and viewpoints, and discuss the projects with the session audience.