

Virginia Garcia-Acosta

Disaster Risk Reduction, Prevention, and Resilience: A Global Comparison

This is a project I am developing throughout my sabbatical (October 2014 - March 2016) in Brazil (Universidade de Brasilia), France (Écoles des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales), Germany (Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society), and Mexico (CIESAS).

The topic of risk and disasters associated to natural hazards from the perspective of social sciences, while neglected for decades, has attained important advances in the last 25 years. Cutting-edge research has precisely addressed the identification of factors that increase vulnerability, both of elements with an incidence in the multiplying of risks and of those agents that contribute to making disasters increasingly destructive. Interests revolving on de-constructing risks, on resilience, on the cultures of risk or disaster, and on the strategies for survival or on adaptive strategies remain dispersed. The articulation and systematization of knowledge concerning these topics that would allow leveraging the advances deriving from studies carried out in several research centers and universities throughout the world remain to be achieved.

Ever since the Risk-Resilience-Network (RRR by its Spanish initials: Red-Riesgo-Resiliencia) was founded, which includes members from Mexico and Europe, we have been interested in its enhancement and expansion through a North-South dialogue, by comparing different realities and identifying common methodologies in a large variety of geographic locations, as well as through trans-disciplinary, comparative, and creative work.

Some issues are at the core of our interests:

- Recover ancestral and culturally built knowledge relating to the prevention of risks in face of natural hazards.
- Identify and typify prevention and adaptation strategies: “cultures of prevention” at a global scale, with a local outlook
- Introduce the cultural dimension of vulnerable groups subjected to certain natural hazards in an international debate, as well as in local and regional public policies.

The general hypotheses that lead our research are:

- Societies are not and have never been passive entities in the face of natural hazards.
- Historically, communities have formulated social and cultural ways to deal with potential risks and disasters.
- Throughout history, societies have developed social strategies for prevention and adaptation in their interaction with the natural world.

As disasters are socially constructed processes and, as such, are unavoidable subjects to be studied from a historical approach in order to understand their genesis and evolution, our emphasis is from anthropological and historical perspective, but in dialogue with other

social sciences. We aim to, collectively, better understand and try to help solve the great problems that afflict those human groups at risk and in vulnerable conditions.