

Joint WebTalk 01

JUNE 15TH 2021

WEBTALK SYNOPSIS

**EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCE
ON FLOOD MANAGEMENT IN
FRANCE AND GERMANY
DIALOGUE BETWEEN PRACTITIONERS AT
THE LOCAL LEVEL**

Report by Patrick Pigeon, moderator, Pr at Université de Savoie-Mont-Blanc and researcher at Médiations laboratory, Paris-Sorbonne University.

Introduction

Since 20 years The French Association for Natural Disaster Risk Reduction (AFPCN) and the German Committee for Disaster Reduction e. V. (DKKV) join efforts in order to leverage various cooperation activities, exchanging good practices between their members, as parts of the civil society segments of their respective National Platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). They even tend to create fruitful cooperation links with their analogues in various Euro-Mediterranean platforms in order to facilitate European cooperation and the exchange of expertise and best-practices between European platforms and experts. This first joint WebTalk is a new experiment to expand this attempt. Further attempts to come. To keep updated on the programm of joint activities, see our contact and social network information at the end of this report.



Dr. Marlene WILLKOMM

Deputy Head of the Flood Protection Centre at the Municipal Drainage Operation Cologne, AöR (1)

Dr. Marlene WILLKOMM will talk about flood protection in the city of Cologne and especially about public relation and communication in regard to flood risk management.



Régis THEPOT

Deputy Secretary General of French association for natural disaster risk reduction (AFPCN) and international expert on DRR policy implementation.

Régis THEPOT will share his experience as a practitioner on flood risk management in France, and more specifically on flood risk governance.



Pr. Patrick PIGEON

Professor at the University of Savoie-Mont-Blanc and member of the Mediations laboratory (Paris IV, Sorbonne University).

Patrick PIGEON has published several books and participated in several European research programs on disaster risk prevention.

If you missed the WebTalk you can watch the recording here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AlsK7XPwA84>

and download the presentations

[See Dr. Marlene WILLKOMM's powerpoint](#)

[See Régis THEPOT's powerpoint](#)

(1) AöR : Anstalt des öffentlichen Rechts

Synopsis and following

More than 40 participants attended the meeting, most of them from France and Germany, but some of them from abroad: Algeria (Pr Mohamed BENAZZOUZ), Austria (Thomas HLATKY, chairman of the Sustainable Non-Life Committee at Insurance Europe), Japan (Pr Norio OKADA) and the US (Pr William SIEMBIEDA), as well as a staff member of the OECD.

The title of this first webinar: **“Exchange of experience on flood management in France and Germany: dialogue between practitioners at the local level”** heralds its objectives: to highlight good practices from which they could inspire each other. This first webinar also intended to identify other themes for future exchanges.

DKKV: German Committee for Disaster Reduction and **AFPCN**: French association for (so-called) “natural disasters” prevention **share the same goal**: to prevent disasters even more, while sharing knowledge, feedbacks, and helping discussions between stakeholders implied. This is why both institutions organized and supported this event, with a specific help coming respectively from the DKKV (Ronja WINKHARDT-ENZ) and AFPCN (Esther BESSIS) staffs.

DR Marlene WILLKOMM, Deputy Head of the Flood Protection Center at the Municipal Drainage Operation Cologne, AöR, and Régis THEPOT, Deputy Secretary General of French association for natural disaster risks reduction (AFPCN) and international expert on DRR policy implementation presented points on flood risk reduction management and prevention they consider most relevant. Strickingly, the structure of their presentation was very similar. It helped a lot the identification of commonalities and, of course, discrepancies between both situations.

In this case, the speakers discussed their respective practice of flood risk prevention in Cologne and Paris, two major European cities, and what can be learnt from each management experience. Both cities experienced numerous disasters related with floods, some of them well documented (Paris, 1910, 2016; Cologne, 1993, 1995).

The main question asked could be presented as follows (and agreed on during the webinar preparatory phases):

What to do in the face of the impossibility to get rid of flood risk, increasing the relevance for solutions helping to reduce future damages levels?

This issue is especially relevant for the lowest frequency events, which will be the most disastrous ones, but of course rarely had to suffer from and poorly awaited by local stakeholders. It is consistent with some quotations coming from the more academic field, as: “Catastrophe is due to happen, yet with a low probability” (Dupuy, J.P. 2002. *Pour un catastrophisme éclairé*. Points, Paris, p. 141). Consequently: “The human mind does not know what to do with non-events” (Kahneman, D. 2016. *Thinking, fast and slow*. French edition, Flammarion, Paris, p. 307).

Three more specific and precise questions were also agreed on by Marlene and Régis:

- What to do in order to increase the empowerment of citizens and local stakeholders in the face of such a situation: relevance of prevention and limitations of prevention, especially for a low frequency event?
- How participative governance is being promoted/implemented in Cologne and in Paris?
- What to do in order to share such “good practices”?

Discussion of these issues between Marlene and Régis and opening the debate to the participants gave way to various questions, some of them while using the webinar chat. We find them below: the questions are in bold characters. Marlene answers are marked with MW, whereas Régis answers are with RT.

Question from a non-identified participant: Are you able to combine the flood risk maps with the (historical) impact/losses? (from insurance?)

MW: Yes, this is possible. However, we haven't had 100-year flood since the flood hazard maps were produced. The floods in eastern Germany have been used to adapt the flood hazard maps.

Question by Pr Samuel RUFAT (University of Cergy, AFPCN): With the documented impact of climate change on river flooding across Europe, should we be raising the flood protection levels in all major cities? (like from 10m to 12.5m in Köln). How frequently and by how much?

MW: In the first political discussions after 1995 the flood protection in Cologne was increased to 10.70m of Cologne Gauge since we had a 10.69m of Cologne Gauge flood. The experts were able to convince politicians to build a protection of 11.30m (HQ 100) and 11.90m (HQ 200) of Cologne Gauge.

The state of North Rhine-Westphalia does not have a "climate factor" for the new building like other states such as Bavaria. There they always charge 10% on top. We in Cologne are not changing the height of the protection at the moment but are trying to reduce the damage by flood prevention.

RT: The 2007 UE flood directive doesn't fix a protection level against floods. Cologne and Paris prove it, with respectively a protection level of 1/100 and approximately 1/20 years, and even less for Paris. Can we be happy with such a situation in Europe today in the face of increased urban floods risks linked with climate change? Is it possible to define European standards to be reached in the years to come, and which would consider separately civil protection and goods protection?

Question by Anne-Marie LEVRAUT (AFPCN): What did the flood risk management directive improve in flood management in Cologne?

MW: The directive supports us and strengthens us in what we do. Especially, if flood protection and prevention tend to be disregarded as the last flood happened a long time ago. Laws and regulations are very good for this.

It also raises awareness among departments that think that flooding is not an issue for them, such as urban planning.

Otherwise, flood protection and the production of flood hazard maps have been implemented without a directive in Cologne.

Following the question Mrs Levraut asked on how flood directive has been implemented and assessed, we find official EU information available while using these links:

https://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/impl_reports.htm

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=SWD:2019:31:FIN&qid=1551205988853&from=EN>

[REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL on the implementation of the Water Framework Directive \(2000/60/EC\) and the Floods Directive \(2007/60/EC\) Second River Basin Management Plans First Flood Risk Management Plans](#)

Question by Pr Mohamed BENAZZOUZ (University of Constantine, Algeria): *The German experience seems very structured in the administrative manner, but what about the intervention during crisis management?*

MW: Our work is to prevent a disaster. If the water level rises above our protection or the wall breaks down, the emergency department, the fire brigade, intervenes.

Since we work closely with the fire brigade during the year and also during a flood and exchange information, it is not a « cold start » for the fire brigade.

Another advantage of a big river is that we have time. We know when the water rises over the walls. What we may not know with a long lead time is when a wall will break down. But that's why we're having the walls guarded.

Question by Pr Samuel RUFAT (University of Cergy, France): *How was the "increased awareness" measured among the public and among politicians after the EU Sequana exercise and after the 2016 and 2018 floods? How come so many people refused to evacuate if the awareness levels were recently raised?*

RT: The issues of risk culture evaluation raise at this point. Moreover, the most effective means to increase it are dependent on specific targets and still pending. It can be addressed by using opinion polls, but they are costly, and at the best, they can provide but a picture of how the situation is now, and for a specific panel of stakeholders.

Developing a collective risk culture should initiate a virtuous process. However, the French Cat-Nat system challenges this assumption, as it is very protective and doesn't favour until now the implementation of prevention measures to be taken by local stakeholders. However, the EU exercise Sequana is still a good example of what can be done frequently in order to increase risk awareness and the materiality of flood risk in the face of major and rare events. Another relevant point is that Sequana needs to have a wide range of stakeholders working together and on the field.

When will we have in Paris a collective flood risk prevention training which would imply the French state representatives, local territorial institutions, and also thousands of inhabitants, which would give way to recommendations on how to improve civil protection as well as risk prevention, and which would integrate collective and shared feedbacks? In this case also, sharing good practices with German colleagues would be very useful and could be relevant.

Question by Jean-Marc TACNET (INRAE, France): *How implemented is the use of nature-based solutions (NBS) in flood risk management?*

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d7d496b5-ad4e-11eb-9767-01aa75ed71a1>

MW: This approach is being tried wherever possible. This is not really possible on a national waterway and Europe's most important transport route.

RT: Such nature-based solutions are not so much implemented in the case of Seine River watershed, even though EPTB Seine Grand Lacs is testing them. In this case, it takes the form of flood-expansion areas, inspired by space for the rivers policies, which demand to discuss implementation issues with local and regional agricultural governmental organizations.

Question by Dr Jean-Michel TANGUY (AFPCN-SHF): *Are Cologne and Paris affected by run-off issues and how the different organisms deal with prevention and forecast measures?*

MW: This is not a problem for river floods in Cologne since the sewer system is also protected.

There are no runoff problems in Cologne due to the topography.

Problems occur in the sewer system or in the case of residents if no back-up protection is installed.

RT: As mentioned earlier, a collaboration with German colleagues on these issues (urban flood risk, and especially on the measures to come...) would be most welcomed.

Question by Dr. Benni THIEBES (DKKV): *How effective are you in communicating flood risks to the people, particularly social groups that are more difficult to reach (e.g. migrants or people with language barriers)?*

MW: Currently we do not have flyers or website in English or other languages.

We also try to reach people with local events. But we also notice that this is very difficult because people usually have other "important" problems to deal with.

Further to this 1st WebTalk

Some other substantial issues seem worth to be addressed during the next steps:

- How to prevent floods related with rising groundwater? (Mathias Maillot PhD stresses on this specific challenge in the case of Paris)
- A comparison between insurances related with floods in both countries, whatever the flood risk type.
- How flood risk prevention is being paid for? The issue has been raised during the webinar.

Organisational matters – suggestions raised for next meetings within a cycle of AFPCN-DKKV joint events:

The possibility to open the circle to other participants has been raised, with a special mention for having the next joint meeting in Strasbourg, or maybe in München. In particular, we find in Strasbourg colleagues working on risk management related with networks, which is very relevant while addressing issues with flood risks in urban area.

Depending on the situation, a proposal was made to address these issues while using a more academic and alternative/complementary frame (eg. in cooperation with Pr Alexander FEKETE, from Cologne Technical University).

To stay updated on our next events and activities

The French Association for Natural Disaster Risk reduction (AFPCN), was created in 2001 in the continuity of the French Committee of the International Decade for the Prevention of Natural Disasters. It is a national center for transversal and multi-risk collective reflection on the issue of natural risks and a recognized player in international cooperation in this field.



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The German Committee for Disaster Reduction (DKKV) is the largest platform for disaster risk reduction in Germany as has been promoting disaster risk reduction in science, practice and in politics for 30 years. DKKV acts as an umbrella organization for German institutions and experts in the field of disaster risk reduction and functions as an intermediary to national and international networks and initiatives. Networking, consulting, and knowledge transfer represent the three main pillars of DKKV.